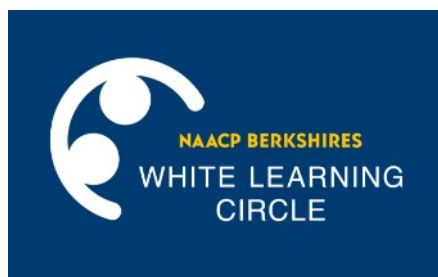


“Do not expect to be taught or shown. Take it upon yourself to use the tools around you to learn and answer your questions.”
[Guide to Allyship](#)



4th Round Syllabus* 2023-2024

Introduction

The White Learning Circle is an **immersive introduction** to the history and legacy of chattel slavery in the United States. Few Americans, especially white ones, fully understand either the history itself or the legacy that the history has created – one that has embedded our culture not only with significant contributions from African-Americans, but also with notions of the superiority of whiteness. African- American contributions are either erased from our textbooks and education and thus not part of our memory or they are considered the work of singular and exceptional persons not as representative of the capacity of Black people as a group. White contributions, on the other hand, are literally “white-washed” and mythologized, becoming fixed in our consciousness as proof of superiority. The fact that many of our revered “Founding Fathers” held human beings in chattel slavery is also erased from our textbooks, education and memory.

In the White Learning Circle we explore the history and legacy of African-Americans through the eyes primarily of Black people as expressed in their scholarship and work. Thus most of the works in the syllabus are written by Black people.

The Circle however, is not a book group. The heart of the shared work we do together is about self-reflection. The work of Circle members is about:

- **acquiring new information** to expand perspectives on race; followed by
- **self-reflection** through which to examine past experiences, assumptions, and behaviors; and
- **practicing change** by trying on new thinking, new ways of speaking, and new ways of behaving in daily life.

Aspirational Outcomes for each member

- We each move forward in our personal journey towards becoming anti-racist;
- We each have become more effective at recognizing and resisting white-centeredness;

* Available online at <https://www.naacpberkshires.org/white-learning-programs/>

- We each continue our commitment to on-going learning about race and to becoming more anti-racist in our daily lives by working for change especially in our white spaces;
- We each feel supported and energized by belonging to a group of learners committed to fostering racial justice.

Topics

The organization of the syllabus is deliberate in its presentation of material in a progressive sequence:

- Beginning sessions address origins and history of racism, the Black experience, and being white; followed by
- NAACP “gamechanger” topics; issues that the NAACP focuses on in its activism because they are central to improving the lives of Black and other marginalized people;
- Final sessions cover reparations, white supremacy and white nationalism, and anti-racism.
- Along the way there are two sessions with no new content set aside for reflection.

Content

For each topic there are several choices of books. Offering this limited option affords everyone the opportunity to read something not previously read and facilitates use of a library for access to the books while maintaining a degree of commonality among members to ensure a measure of similar content. Most, but not all, titles are available through local libraries. With a few exceptions, these books are all works of Black authors. For each topic except history there are also two or three other media sources for supplementary exploration.

We encourage everyone to **read – or at least start – as many books as possible** over the course of the 8 months. Books are the most substantive way to acquire information about the topics under discussion. The less time-consuming media sources are offered for those times when life gets in the way in order to ensure everyone is prepared for some level of participation at each session. Ultimately, each member chooses how much content they can manage. The more you engage with, the more meaningful the experience will be.

Consider keeping a journal for each of the blocks of time you work. Jot down the ideas/quotes that really caught your attention, brief notes about why they were meaningful to you and questions they raise for more exploration.

Guiding Questions – the framework for approaching the reading

The focus of the Circle is on personal growth in becoming an anti-racist. Each member begins at a unique place in this journey. While books are the primary tool for learning, the Circle is neither a book group, nor an academic course. The content itself is not what the Circle is about and there are no right and wrong answers. The guiding questions are intended to promote self-reflection and personal examination about how race has had an impact in each of our lives:

1. What surprised you in the book you read and why?
2. Did anything you read make you uncomfortable, defensive, or angry and why?
3. How did what was presented line up or not line up with your own experience / view of the world?

4. What did you learn about white-centering? How has it operated in your personal relationships and the opportunities you have had?
5. Did your reading prompt you to see things about yourself and your life, and your beliefs and behavior, that you hadn't noticed before?
6. Did the reading make you reconsider any of your assumptions, behaviors or actions? What changes are you considering?
7. What questions did the book raise for you that you are interested in exploring further?

Being in Community in the Circle

Though we are learning as individuals, we also are learning in a community when we meet as a Circle. Within our circle we:

- **maintain confidentiality** to create a brave space for courageous sharing.
- **share our learning** and respond to each other with openness, compassion and curiosity;
- **ask questions of each other** to assist each other in “seeing” the way we each have internalized white supremacy;
- **encourage each other in taking risks** to disrupt racist ways of thinking, speaking, and behaving.
- **speak honestly**, even when it makes you feel vulnerable.
- **help each other to identify blind spots**, in order to make space to choose change.
- **look for the learning opportunity** in whatever situation you find yourself.
- **approach this work and each other with humility and gratitude**; we each have our own experiences and insights to share and this learning is never done.

Thanks to the Circle, I am working on my own humility when talking about race with other white people. It's still uncomfortable to admit that I started the Circle believing I was "more advanced" in my anti-racism journey. I now understand that that perspective serves no one, least of all me. Former Circle member

Black mentors

The circle is composed of white members only:

- so members do not refrain from honest speaking for fear of “exposing themselves”;
- so white members do not look to a Black person to raise the difficult issues and to make white members feel good;
- because white people need to respect the degree to which Black people are exhausted by having to explain racism to white people and refrain from seeking out Black people for that purpose; white people need to do their own research before seeking out Black people for information.
- because white people must equip themselves with the knowledge and skills to take leadership in disrupting the systems that for centuries have privileged them and kept Black and other marginalized people from thriving.

In order to keep the Black experience framed in our discussion, a Black mentor will attend the last half hour of most meetings to help with questions and issues that arose from our discussion.

Guidelines for Conversations with Our Black Mentors

1. First and foremost, be in the space with our Black Mentors as a **learner**; engage in active and open **listening** so we create an environment in which our Black Mentors truly feel heard and that their thoughts/ideas are respected and meaningful.
2. Keep in mind that many Black and other POC feel vulnerable in white spaces because of past experience with microaggressions and outright intentional racism;
3. Frame questions to our Black Mentors around issues that are not personal;
4. Be thoughtful and considerate of our Black Mentor's privacy; let them decide the degree to which they want to share any personal experiences. We are not here to ask them to share potentially traumatic experiences, and additionally we cannot know beforehand what experience is traumatic for a particular individual.
5. Remember that Black and other POC experience life in quite different ways than do white people. Do not challenge or question their experience or ask them to justify their ideas, thoughts, and opinions.

Member-led Discussion

In order to stimulate discussion among Circle members, for each session two members will lead our discussion. Assignments of co-leaders for each session will be confirmed at the organizational session.

All members are encouraged to use the **Guiding Questions** to assist in their own self reflection as preparation for each discussion.

Co-Leader Responsibilities

In addition to reading one of the books for the topic under discussion, co-leaders meet ahead of their assigned session to:

- share their individual reflections about the new content;
- develop 1-3 questions that will elicit personal reflection about the topic for the session to pose to the Circle for discussion;
- prepare in advance one question to kick off the conversation with a Black mentor if one is scheduled for that session.

During the session, co-leaders:

- provide time management for the session;
- ensure opportunity for all who wish to share;
- initiate the conversation with the Black mentor

Preparation prior to our first meeting

1. Subscribe to and read regularly the [Anti-Racism Daily](#)
2. Begin reading the first book on the **History** list that you have not already read.

History is the essential and foundational component of this learning; books are the resource that offer the level of substance needed for real understanding. The more one understands the past, the better equipped one is to navigate the present and impact the future.

Finding a Partner

In doing this work you will likely learn much that you did not previously understand about our history and its impact on the present. As a white person, we each need to reckon with our own legacy from the past. This requires that we ask ourselves difficult questions and be willing to face uncomfortable answers – in other words make ourselves vulnerable.

White supremacy has operated through the white washing of truth, the promotion of “colorblindness” as equity, the claim of a post-racial society, and the denial of complicity or responsibility. To call this out – to declare “the emperor has no clothes” – especially, when one may be the emperor, takes courage and feels very risky. We need to recognize the protective layer we each have that ensures our own comfort and open ourselves so we can be touched by the experiences of those whom our culture has marginalized.

The Circle is intended to provide a level of support and a safe space with others going through the same process. Some of us also may find that having a trusted family member, friend, or colleague to talk with may help in exercising our vulnerability muscle.

As the Circle progresses, and members become comfortable with each other, each of you may find reaching out to another Circle member for sharing outside the Circle is also a helpful way to practice your vulnerability.

Calendar and Learning Resources 2023-24

Oct. 1 **Organizational Meeting**
Overview of plan
Review of Syllabus
Personal introductions
Assigning leaders for each session

Note: You may choose any book from the list, however, be aware that the books for each topic are listed in order of accessibility or importance so consider selecting the first book from each list that you have not already read.

Oct. 15 **History**
Books:
The Warmth of Other Suns by Isabel Wilkerson
How the Word is Passed by Clint Smith
Caste: the Origins of Our Discontent by Isabel Wilkerson
The 1619 Project: an Origin Story ed. by Nicole Hannah-Jones et al
The Half has Never been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism by Edward Baptist
Stamped From the Beginning: a History of Racist ideas in the United States by Ibram X. Kendi

Black Mentor: Dr. Frances Jones-Sneed

Oct. 29 **Being Black**
Books:
Between the World and Me by Ta-Nehisi Coates
I'm Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness by Austin Channing Brown
Letters to My White Male Friends by Das-Devlin Ross
Eloquent Rage by Brittany Cooper
When they Call You a Terrorist by Asha Bandele & Patrisse Khan-Cullors
Heavy by Kiese Laymon

Media:

[Who Is Black In America \(CNN Documentary\)](#)

[Race Matters: America in Crisis PBS NewsHour Special](#)

Black Mentor: TBD

Nov. 12

Being White

Books:

So You Want to Talk About Race by Ijeoma Oluo

Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon for White America by Michael Eric Dyson

White Rage: the Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide by Carol Anderson

Nice Racism: How Progressive White People Perpetuate Racial Harm by Robin DiAngelo

White Women: Everything You Already Know about Your Own Racism and How to Do Better by Regina Jackson and Saira Rao

Mediocre: The Dangerous Legacy of White Male America by Ijeoma Oluo

Media:

[Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack](#) Peggy McIntosh, feminist, activist
Robin DiAngelo and the Problem With Anti-racist Self-Help: What two new books reveal about the white progressive pursuit of racial virtue By Danzy Senna

White People: I Don't Want You To Understand Me Better, I Want You To Understand Yourselves by Ijeoma Oluo

[The White Man's Guilt - Ebony article by James Baldwin](#)

[The March of the Karens](#) by Lagaya Mishan in NYT Magazine

The White Savior Industrial Complex by Teju Cole (Atlantic Magazine)

Nov. 26

Practicing Self-reflection

Dec. 10

Voting Rights

Books:

Our Time is Now: Power, Purpose and the Fight for a Fair America by Stacey Abrams

One Person, No Vote by Carol Anderson

Uncounted: the Crisis of Voter Suppression in America by Gilda Daniels
Say It Louder by Tiffany Cross

Media:

[Voting Laws Round-up 2022](#) Brennan Center for Justice

All In: the Fight for Democracy with Stacey Abrams – documentary on Amazon Prime

[Whose Vote Counts?](#) Frontline

Black Mentor:

Note: 4 week break for winter holiday season

Jan. 7

Education

Books:

"Multiplication is for White People": Raising Expectations for Other People's Children by Lisa Delpit

Unconscious Bias in Schools by Tracy A. Benson and Sarah Fiarman

We Want to Do More than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom by Bettina L. Love

Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria by Beverly D Tatum

A Most Tolerant Little Town: the Explosive Beginning of School Desegregation by Rachel Louise Martin

Media:

[Why black girls are targeted for punishment at school -- and how to change that TED talk](#) by Monique W. Morris

[Edutopia: Diversity](#)

[Why hugging out racism in education just won't cut it | Laura Mae Lindo](#)
TED Talk

[Learning for Justice](#) from the Southern Poverty Law Center

Black Mentor:

Jan. 21

Environmental Justice

Books:

Farming While Black by Leah Penniman

What the Eyes Don't See by Mona Hanna-Attisha

Educator and Activist: My Life and Times in the Quest for Environmental Justice by Bunyan Bryant Jr.

Media:

[David Lammy: Climate justice can't happen without racial justice TED talk](#)

[Majora Carter: Greening the ghetto](#) TED talk

[Climate Justice Alliance](#)

[Sunrise Movement](#)

Black Mentor:

Feb. 4

Criminal Justice

Books:

Just Mercy by Bryan Stephenson

The New Jim Crow by Michelle Alexander

Rage of Innocence: How America Criminalizes Black Youth by Kristin Henning

Until We Reckon by Danielle Sered

Media:

The Black Family in the Age of Mass Incarceration by Ta-Nehisi Coates

[Slaves of the State](#) 13th Amendment, mass incarceration and the prison industrial complex *Educating4Democracy* blog

What prosecutors and incarcerated people can learn from each other by Jarrell Daniels TED talk

Black Mentor:

Feb. 18 Housing

Books:

The Color of Law: a Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America by Richard Rothstein

Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership by Keenaga-Yamahtta Taylor

Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City by Matthew Desmond

Race & Place: How Urban Geography Shapes the Journey to

Reconciliation by David P. Leong

Media:

[Shelterforce: the Original Voice of Community Development](#)

What if gentrification was about healing communities instead of displacing them? By [Liz Ogbu](#) TED talk

[Mass Fair Housing](#)

[Dudley Neighbors Community Land Trust](#)

Black Mentor:

Mar. 3 Time to reflect together

Mar. 24 Health

Books:

Under the Skin: the Hidden Toll of Racism on American Lives and on the Health of Our Nation by Linda Villarosa

Medical Apartheid by Harriet Washington

Black Man in a White Coat by Damon Tweedy

My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to

Mending Our Hearts and Bodies by Resmaa Menakem

Media:

[Why your doctor should care about social justice by Mary Bassett](#)

TED talk

[How racism makes us sick by David R. Williams](#) TED talk

[The Use of Race in Medicine and Implications for Health Equity](#) session 1
UCSF School of Medicine

Black Mentor:

April 7

Economic Justice

Books:

The Sum of Us by Heather McGee

White Space, Black Hood: Opportunity Hoarding and Segregation in the Age of Inequality by Sheryll Cashin

Decolonizing Wealth: Indigenous Wisdom to Heal Divides and Restore Balance by Edgar Villanueva

Media:

[Racism has a cost for everyone by Heather C. McGhee](#) TED talk

[Racial Justice also means Economic Justice](#) excerpt The Laura Flanders Show

Black Mentor:

April 21

Reparations

Books:

From Here to Equality by William Darity and Kirsten Mullen

Long Overdue: the Politics of Racial Reparations by Charles P. Henry

Reparations: A Christian Call for Repentance and Repair by Duke L. Kwon and Gregory Thompson

Stolen Wealth, Hidden Power: the Case for Reparations for Mass Incarceration by Tasseli McKay

Media:

[The Case for Reparations](#) by Ta-Nehisi Coates in *The Atlantic*

[Why We Need Reparations for Black Americans](#) by Rashawn Ray and Andre M. Perry

Black mentor:

May 5

White Supremacy and White Nationalism

Books:

Backlash: What Happens When We Talk Honestly About Racism in America by George Yancy

me and white supremacy: Combat Racism, Change the World and Become a Good Ancestor by Layla F. Said

They Want to Kill Americans: the Militias, Terrorists, and Deranged Ideology of the Trump Insurgency by Malcom Nance

Media:

[White Supremacy Culture](#) Tema Okun's contribution to "our shared anti-racist racial justice commitment"
[Southern Poverty Law Center: White Nationalism](#)

May 19

Anti-Racism

Books:

How to be an Anti-racist by Ibram X Kendi

No More Heroes: Grass Roots Challenges to the Savior Mentality by

Jordan Flaherty

What White People Can Do Next by Emma Dabiri

Media:

[The difference between being "not racist" and antiracist by Ibram X.](#)

Kendi TED talk

[Guide to Allyship](#)

[Ezra Klein Interviews Ibram X Kendi](#) Transcript from the *New York Times*

Black Mentor:

June 2

White Learning Circle – Evaluation