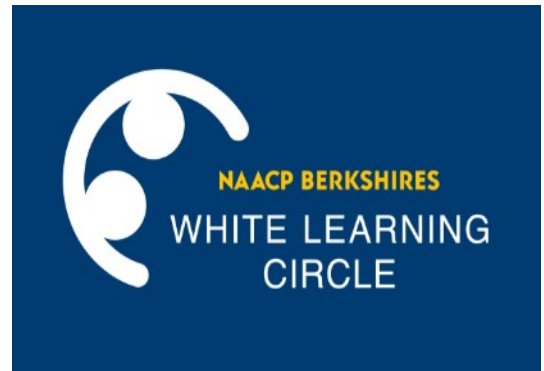


*“Do not expect to be taught or shown.
Take it upon yourself to use the tools around you
to learn and answer your questions.”*
[Guide to Allyship](#)



5th Round Being in the Circle* 2024-2025

All sessions are from 4:00-5:30 on Sunday afternoons via ZOOM. The Calendar and Resources section (beg. p. 7) provides the specific dates.

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 rather than work that is representative of the capacity of any and all Black people.

White contributions, on the other hand, are literally “white-washed”, elevated, 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 glossed over in our textbooks, education and memory.

In the White Learning Circle we dig into the history and legacy of slavery and the impact that history has on both Black and White individuals through the molding of all our institutions to uphold the superiority of whiteness. Primarily, we use the written and spoken works of Black people so we might see the works we live in through their eyes. We also learn how our culture is white-dominant and about the impact that dominance has on each of us individually and on all our institutional structures and policies.

Fear is often an ever present emotion for many of us when we engage in explorations of race. When we come to understand the history of race and racism, we become more comfortable and less fearful about having conversations about race and reaching across racial divides.

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

Aspirational Outcomes for Each of Us

- We each increase our understanding about how race and racism are built into our culture, our institutions, and ourselves;
- We each have become more effective at recognizing and resisting white-centeredness in ourselves;
- 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.

Self-Reflection – the Framework for Approaching Our Learning

The heart of the work we do together is about self-reflection. The work of Circle members is about:

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

The Circle is neither a book group, nor an academic course. The Circle is about building our individual capacity to make change – in ourselves and in our communities. The content that is the source of our learning and unlearning is essential, but not sufficient. The focus of the Circle is on personal growth in becoming an anti-racist through self-reflection. A useful metaphor for self-reflection is looking into a mirror (inward) rather than through a lens (outward). Self-reflection is how we turn content into our personal growth - our capacity for making change and letting go of the fear that holds us back.

For each of us the journey is unique; just as the path we have taken to this point is unique. Our growth comes by engaging with the content through the feelings and memories the content evokes; through being willing to ask ourselves why those particular feelings and memories have surfaced; and willing to think about what that may mean about our own history with race and racism as a white person. There are no easy right and wrong answers.

There are so many resources to choose from to do this learning – and new ones being published/released constantly. Those included in the Circle learning plan may look daunting. But quality not quantity is the point.

Read/listen with care and attention:

- note what you are feeling; e.g. shame, anger, confusion, resistance, validation etc.
- note what is physically happening in your body; altered breathing, muscle tension, edginess, etc.
- note what you skipped over because you thought you knew it already or had nothing more to learn;
- ask yourself what may have triggered the responses you are having.

Engage with the amount of content you need to start exploring your own experiences, ideas, and behaviors around race and racism through self-reflection. Sometimes just a few sentences or a paragraph may provoke an “aha’ moment. Other times you may need to go deeper into the content.

This is not easy work; it may take practice to notice the feelings because we have learned from an early age to push them away, to be “colorblind” and to see race as not a problem for whites. Once we start noticing, the feelings likely will be painful ones, not pleasant ones. Truth hurts.

Circle sessions are intended to encourage, stimulate and support us in our individual learning. It is the work we do individually that is most important to our own growth.

Vulnerability

In our culture, vulnerability is often seen as a weakness. To be vulnerable, however, is to cut away something and open a space. That is what happens when we toss out old habits and beliefs to make way for new learning and changed behavior.

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 an empathetic¹ 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.

Member-led Discussion

In order to deepen our individual experience, for each session two members will co-lead our discussion by providing a framework for sharing our individual self-reflections about what we each learned from the resources we chose for the topic at hand.

¹See Brené Brown [on Empathy](#)

Co-leaders will:

- communicate with each other 2- 3 weeks ahead of their session to make sure each select a **different** resource for that session – preferably one of the books, to ensure a deeper exposure to the topic;
- meet (in person, by phone, on Zoom) with each other 3-5 days before the session to share with each other your own self-reflections about your learning and agree on a framework for the Circle discussion;
- if the Chosen framework requires preparatory work by members, send information to Circle members no later than Friday before the Sunday session;
- provide time management for the session;
- Keep the discussion focused on self-reflection;
- ensure that all members have the opportunity to speak.

Assignments of co-leaders for each session will be confirmed at the organizational session.

Strategies for Framing a Session

The following are suggestions only; co-leaders may frame the discussion in any way you choose to elicit the sharing of self-reflection.

- Each co-leader shares a personal reflection on some aspect of what they learned and asks for members to respond to what was shared;
- Co-leaders agree on one event, issue, piece of information ... and then each share their own reflection on that item, followed by members reflections on the same item;
- Ask each member to come prepared to share one quote from what they read or heard, that had particular meaning for them and explain the meaning.

Topics

The organization of our work is deliberate in its presentation of material in a progressive sequence:

- Beginning sessions address the history and legacy of slavery, the Black experience, and being white; followed by
- The institutional systems in which race and racism are embedded. These systems are interconnected and the relationships between them reinforce how race and racism operates in each. We explore them in groups in order to better understand the connections between them.
- Final sessions explore white supremacy and white nationalism, and creating communities of belonging through anti-racism.
- Along the way there are sessions for discussions with Black mentors.

Content

For each topic there is a choice of 3-4 books. Offering this limited option affords everyone the opportunity to read something not previously read. It both frames our discussion around a topic and enriches the conversation with the sharing of multiple approaches. It also helps us to focus on ourselves and our personal learning and resist the temptation to talk about a specific resource. With some exceptions, the resources are all the work of Black authors.

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 “short pieces” 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, we each choose how much content we can manage as well as how much content we need to stimulate deep self-reflection – to have “aha” moments. . The more content we each 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.

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, we will have four sessions with a Black mentor over the course of our time together.

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.

Acquiring the Books

Most of the books are available through the CWMars system used by public libraries in Berkshire County. You may need to plan in advance to have the book you want in a timely manner. If your local library does not have them, request a hold and they will be sent to your local library for you.

If you wish to purchase new books, consider shopping at a local bookstore or at Bookshop.org (a consortium of local book shops that returns funds to those shops when you buy online) instead of using Amazon.

It is also possible to get copies in good condition for much less money at online used book dealers. Try [Better World Books](#), [Thrift Books](#), or [Powell's Books](#) (located in Portland, OR, so a bit larger carbon footprint)

Preparation prior to our first meeting

- Consider subscribing to and regularly reading both [Reimagined](#) and [The 19th News](#) to see current events from different perspectives than mainstream sources.
- Begin reading the books for the first discussion session on **Slavery**.

Learning our history from a “not white” perspective is the essential and foundational component of this work; books are not the only resource, but they do offer the deepest substance for creating real mental and emotional understanding. The more one understands the past, the better equipped one is to navigate the present and impact the future.

Calendar and Learning Resources 2024-25

Oct. 6 **Organizational Meeting**

Understanding our work

Sharing stories

Co-leading

Note on the reading: 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. 20 **Slavery and the ideas it generated** **Co-Leaders:**

Books: (intentionally children's books)

American Story by Kwame Alexander

Born on the Water by Nikole Hannah-Jones and Renée Watson

Stamped (For Kids): Racism, Antiracism and You adapted by Sonja Cherry-Paul

Nov. 3 **The Legacy of Slavery** **Co-Leaders**

Books

The Warmth of Other Suns by Isabel Wilkerson

How the Word is Passed by Clint Smith

All that She Carried: the Journey of Ashley's Sack, a Black Keepsake by Tiya Miles

Nov. 17 **Being Black** **Co-Leaders:**

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

Eloquent Rage by Brittany Cooper

When they Call You a Terrorist by Asha Bandele & Patrisse Khan-Cullors

Dec. 1 **Being White** **Co-Leaders:**

Books:

Waking Up White: and Finding Myself in the Story of Race by Debbie Irving

So You Want to Talk About Race by Ijeoma Oluo

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

The White Bonus: Five Families and the Cash Value of Racism in America by Tracie McMillan

Short pieces:

[Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack](#) Peggy McIntosh, feminist, activist

"Talking About Race Means Talking About Whiteness" ch. 2 in *Learning and Teaching While White* by Jenna Chandler-Ward & Elizabeth Denevi [Library availability through the Commonwealth Catalog]

[Start Seeing Color](#) Article in *Anti-racism Daily*

“The Moves of White Progressives” ch. 5 in *Nice Racism: How Progressive White People Perpetuate Racial Harm* by Robin DiAngelo
[The Wound is No Longer Hidden](#) Blog by Michael Brosnan

Dec. 15 Black Mentor:

Note: 3 week break for winter holiday season

Racialized Systems

Education, Housing, Criminal Justice, Voting Rights

Select, at a minimum, 2 books and 4 short pieces for the 3 sessions that cover these topics. Be sure to select at least one resource from each topic. Co-leaders see instructions above.

Jan. 5 th Education & Housing Co-leaders

Education Books:

“Multiplication is for White People”: *Raising Expectations for Other People’s Children*
by Lisa Delpit

Sing a Rhythm, Dance a Blues: Education for the Liberation of Black and Brown Girls
by Monique W. Morris

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

Education Short Pieces

“Burning “Brown” to the Ground” ch. 3 in *White Rage: the Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide* by Carol Anderson

[Advocate for Critical Race Theory Education](#) Article in the *Anti-racism Daily*

Waking Up White by Debbie Irving pp. 124-155,

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

“Analyzing How Whiteness Operates as a System in Our Schools” ch. 3 in *Learning and Teaching While White* by Jenna Chandler-Ward & Elizabeth Denevi [Library availability through the Commonwealth Catalog]

[Why Affirmative Action is Still Necessary](#) Article from Anti-Racism Daily

[The Lasting Impact of the Jena Six](#) Article from Anti-Racism Daily

[The Push to Censor Race and Racism in Children's Books](#) Article from Anti-Racism
Daily

[Explore Education Articles in the Anti-Racism Daily](#)

Housing Books

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

Pittsfield Redlining Study

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

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

Housing Short Pieces

“Black House/White Market” ch. 2 in *The Whiteness of Wealth* by Dorothy A. Brown

“The G.I. Bill” p. 32 in *Waking Up White* by Debbie Irving

[Fight Environmental Housing Injustice](#) Issue of *Anti-racism Daily*

[Why You Need to Know About Appraisal Bias](#)

[Pick an article of your choice in Shelterforce](#)

[Holding Redlining's Perpetrators Accountable](#)

[The Role of Gentrification in Breonna Taylor's Murder](#) Article in *Anti-Racism Daily*

[How Neglect and Exploitation Become the Housing Standard](#) Article in *Anti-Racism Daily*

[Explore Housing Articles in the Anti-Racism Daily](#)

Jan. 19 **Criminal Justice & Voting Rights** **Co-leaders:**

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

Criminal Justice Short pieces

“Self defense” (ch.9) and “Punishment” (ch.10) in *The 1619 Project* created by Nikole Hannah-Jones

“Rolling Back Civil Rights” ch. 4 in *White Rage: the Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide* by Carol Anderson

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

[Lynching in America](#)

[What prosecutors and incarcerated people can learn from each other by Jarrell Daniels](#) TED talk

[End Disparities in Crack Cocaine Sentencing](#) Article in *Anti-racism Daily*

[End Cash Bail](#) Article in *Anti-racism Daily*

[The Effect of Media Bias on School Shootings](#) Article in *Anti-Racism Daily*

[Explore Criminal Justice Articles in the Anti-Racism Daily](#)

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

Voting Rights Short Pieces

[How Changes to Voting Laws Prompted Education Inequality](#)

[Fight Voter Suppression](#) Article in *Anti-Racism Daily*

[Voter Suppression | How Making It Harder to Vote Undermines Democracy in the United States](#)

[Whose Vote Counts?](#) Frontline

[End Felony Disenfranchisement](#) Article in Anti-Racism Daily

[Reject the Modern Day Poll Tax](#) Article in Anti-Racism Daily

Feb. 2nd Integrating Education, Housing, Criminal Justice, Voting Rights

Co-leaders:

Feb. 16 Black Mentor

Health, Environmental and Economic Justice, Reparations

Select, at a minimum, 2 books and 4 short pieces for the 3 sessions that cover these topics. Be sure to select at least one resource from each topic. Co-leaders see instructions above.

Mar. 2 Health & Environmental Justice Co-leaders

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

The Bodies Keep Coming: Dispatches from a Black Trauma Surgeon on Racism, Violence, and How We Heal by Brian H. Williams

My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies by Resmaa Menakem

Health Short Pieces

[Aline Geronimus discusses "weathering" with Linda Villarosa](#)

[Advocate for Black Mental Health](#) Article in *Anti-Racism Daily*

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

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

[Latest Round of Anti-DEI Attacks Targets Maternal Health](#) Article in *Anti-Racism Daily*

[Explore Health Articles in the Anti-Racism Daily](#)

Environmental Justice Books

The Intersectional Environmentalist : How to Dismantle Systems of Oppression to Protect People + Planet by Leah Thomas

Farming While Black by Leah Penniman

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

Environmental Justice Short Pieces

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

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

[About The Green New Deal](#) Sunrise Movement

[Countering the Racist Roots of Environmentalism with Climate Justice](#) Article from Anti-Racism Daily

4DWN

[The Community fight to Save a Forest and Stop Cop City](#) Article from Anti-Racism Daily

[Explore Environment Articles in the Anti-Racism Daily](#)

Mar. 16 Economic Justice & Reparations Co-leaders:

Economic Justice Books

The Sum of Us by Heather McGee

The White Bonus: Five Families and the Cash Value of Racism in America by Tracie McMillan

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

Economic Justice Short Pieces

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

[Racial Justice also means Economic Justice](#) excerpt The Laura Flanders Show
[Are Race-based Law suits affecting Community Lenders?](#)

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

Reparations Short Pieces

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

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

[California Reparations Report](#)

[Support Reparations](#) article in *Anti-Racism Daily*

[Support Black Farmers](#) article in *Anti-Racism Daily*

[Advocate for Reparations for Survivors of the Tulsa Race Riots](#) article in *Anti-Racism Daily*

Mar. 30 Integrating Health, Environmental and Economic Justice, Reparations

Co-leaders:

Apr. 13 Black Mentor

Apr. 27 White Supremacy and White Nationalism Co-Leaders:

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

Short Pieces

[White Supremacy Culture](#) Tema Okun's contribution to "our shared anti- racist racial justice commitment"

[Southern Poverty Law Center: White Nationalism](#)

May 4th Building Communities of Belonging Co-Leaders:

Books:

Anti-racism as Daily Practice: Refuse Shame, Change White Communities, and Help Create a Just World by Jennifer Harvey

How to be an Anti-racist by Ibram X Kendi

What White People Can Do Next by Emma Dabiri

Short Pieces

[Expressions of Belonging](#) Podcast from the Othering and Belonging Institute

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

[Center People of Color in Anti-Racism Education](#) Article in *Anti-Racism Daily*

"Belonging" in *the Four Pivots: Reimagining Justice, Reimagining Ourselves* by Shawn A. Ginwright

[Guide to Allyship](#)

[The Nightmare and the Dream with Dax-Devlon Ross](#)

May 18 Black Mentor

June 1 Coming Full circle