

WHITE WOMEN ON CONSTRUCTING RACISM/WHITE SUPREMACY

WHY DID THEY CREATE RACISM/WHITE SUPREMACY

It Was Created to Uplift White People While Oppressing Black
People - Whites Gained Unjust Enrichment While Creating a
Large Wealth Disparity Gap - So Black People need Reparations
ASAP - to Resolve Social Emotional and Economic Depression!

Below is a Study by a White Woman - She Attempts to Unlock Some of the
Motives and History Behind Constructing Racism/White Supremacy

By Judy Helfand

I hope to show racism/white supremacy consists of a body of knowledge, ideologies, norms, and other practices that have been constructed over the history of the American Colonies and the greater U.S. with roots in European history. The practices of racism/white supremacy affects how we think about race, what we see when we look at certain physical features, how we build our own racial identities, how we operate in the world, and our place in regards to race. Racism/white supremacy is shaped and maintained by the full array of social institutions; government, legal, economic, political, educational, religious, military, and cultural. We are all affected as individuals and groups by racism/white supremacy. Thus, whiteness is constantly evolving in response to social forces and the constellation of people who are seen as white, which may change over time, but blacks are excluded from that category.

According to Theodore Allen, the practices of racism/white supremacy and the accompanying "white race" were invented in the U.S. as part of a system of racial oppression designed to solve a particular problem in colonial Virginia. For now, the important element of his theory is that whiteness serves to preserve the position of a ruling white elite who benefit economically from the labor of the middle and low class. Whiteness determines who qualifies as "white" and maintains a race and class hierarchy in which the group of people who qualify as white, disproportionately control power and resources, and within that group of white people, a small minority of elite control most of the group's power and resources, (the EE).

As individuals in the U.S., we are assigned a racial identity at birth based on our appearance, or on the race assigned to our parents. Growing up we are shaped by the practices of racism/white supremacy because it affects our self identity. In most cases observers see us as members of our assigned racial group. This may take many forms, including both the desire to structure a system based on equality, and a desire to eliminate racial categories altogether.

The tension between (1) the self identity of blacks, and the ways they operate, and the ways in which they are seen by others, and (2) the way others expect them to operate does exist. In the field of labor history, the Social Security Act, the Labor Relations Act, and the GI Bill, it reveals how whiteness is constructed and maintained, for white peoples' benefit, through supposedly neutral government policies and institutions, we find are not equal on evaluation.

European Historical Basis for Whiteness:

Prior to the establishment of Colonial Virginia, Europeans already had a history of viewing non-European people as different and inferior, even questioning their humanity. The African Slave Trade is a prime example and was an increasingly lucrative business for the US and European Nations, and became a booming business for England. Some researchers argue that European culture produced people who needed a lower class group, a class of people who they considered inferior, a people who incorporated qualities rejected, or even demonized by

1 European standards, allowing Europeans to develop and force acceptance of a system of white
2 racial privilege. In fact, the system was so well digested that by the time they wrote the U.S.
3 Constitution, most of those engaged in drafting and enacting it, saw no internal conflict in adapting
4 a document based on liberty, equality, and the rights of men that excluded (blacks) from those
5 inalienable rights. Liberty was, within whiteness and reserved for white people.

6 The Virginia Colony and the Foundation for White Supremacy:

7 Tobacco proved profitable initially, the market seemed unlimited, and everyone in Virginia turned
8 to growing as much tobacco as possible. Tobacco is a labor intensive crop and as the demand for
9 workers increased, more and more bond laborers were sent over from England. Their survival rate
10 was low and few workers lasted 10 yrs., which added to the need for labor. By the 1620s, African
11 slaves from the Caribbean colonies were also going to Virginia.

12 As more bond laborers survived their tenure, the number of freemen increased. However, through
13 a combination of factors, starting in the 1660s, land ownership evolved into increasingly large
14 plantations for a smaller number of rich men. Many freemen lost their small holdings, or never
15 received any, and were reduced to being tenant farmers. They became increasingly discontent with
16 the distribution of land and wealth in Virginia, so resistance surfaced, most notably in the famous
17 Bacon's Rebellion of 1673. Bond laborers and slaves united and initiated resistance, protesting
18 their current situation and their future prospects.

19 By the late 1660s, Virginia began to enact laws to separate European bond laborers and African
20 slaves, the large landowners had become an elite group faced with an increasingly unruly populace
21 of mostly European small land holders and artisans, freemen without land, and European bond
22 laborers. These large landowners required a large workforce to grow, harvest, and cure tobacco
23 which remained the basis of the Virginia economy. Faced with the problem of how to maintain
24 social control, the small ruling elite searched for a way to defuse the potential for rebellion, insofar
25 as possible and to create a class that would support the elite and help suppress rebellions. So, they
26 began to create a system of racial oppression that would divide the slaves and bond laborers into
27 black and white, with special privileges for whites. Then the Virginia assembly utilized a system
28 of acts to foster contempt of whites for blacks.

29 Later laws were set to specifically prevent relationships between Europeans and Africans. In 1691
30 a law was enacted for the "prevention of that abominable mixture and spurious issue "due to
31 intermarriage of black or mulatto men to English or any white woman". Other laws aimed at
32 dividing whites and blacks by specifying special privileges to whites, and denying blacks rights
33 they had previously held. A 1705 law decreed that the livestock of African slaves was to be
34 confiscated and given to poor free whites, while white bond laborers could continue to raise
35 livestock. In 1723 the Virginia Assembly passed a law denying the right to vote to free blacks.
36 Earlier laws had already prohibited free African-Americans from holding public office or
37 witnessing against a white person, and free African-Americans were prohibited from lifting a hand
38 against a "Christian, not being a Negro or mulatto.

39 These and similar laws legislated different social status for whites and blacks of the same economic
40 status. Thus, over the course of the first fifty years, in Colonial Virginia, the criminal system of

racism/white supremacy emerged that has lasted to this day. As the number of African slaves increased and the percentage of free European bond laborers rose, the white small land holders and tenant farmers were drafted into white militia (KKK Foundations), organized to prevent African slave insurrections. Systems of rewards encouraged whites to turn in any runaway slaves. Black sambos and sellouts would do the same thing. Although whites remained impoverished in large numbers, most felt no affinity with the African slaves, who suffered much worse conditions under the same system.

Defining Whiteness through Immigration Policy:

Immigration and naturalization policies were, and continue to be, a significant factor in determining who "looks" white. Most people are familiar with the anti-miscegenation laws, but there were others that affected marriage as well. Unseen practices, segregation, laws prohibiting marriages between whites and blacks, and immigration and naturalization policies worked together to determine which physical characteristics went into the mix we see as white. This struggle was enacted amidst the turmoil of industrialization and the dissolution of slavery with the ensuing structuring of a new method for maintaining economic advantages and racial oppression. Point being once deemed white in immigration, they became citizens, and had opportunity to gradually adopt the practices of whiteness, to be accepted as white, and to become entitled to the unearned systemic advantages. Blacks could not get these privileges.

Urban/Suburban Segregation:

Today we inhabit a landscape in which urban and suburban areas figure more prominent than rural areas. Urban areas are understood to contain ghettos where blacks struggle amid crime and poverty, while suburbia is most white families raising children in clean and pleasant areas. Racial boundaries were shaped by Federal policies, with agencies such as FHA (Federal Housing Authority), VA (Veterans Administration), banks, and real estate developers. The FHA and VA were key agencies after the war in making it possible for young, first-time buyers to enter the housing market. The FHA also loaned money to builders, to enable them to build large tracts of low-cost housing. Many city dwellers who had previously been unable to buy were able to buy in the suburbs with a lower monthly housing expense than they had as renters.

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Theoretically, VA loans were available to all GIs and the FHA was intended to assist all first-time buyers, but blacks were seldom able to obtain these loans. And even if African-Americans had been able to obtain a loan, most suburban developments had restrictive

covenants, which meant owners were blocked from selling to blacks. As Brodtkin describes it: {The **FHA** believed in racial segregation. Throughout its history, it publicly and actively promoted

1 restrictive covenants}. Before the war, these forbade sales to African-Americans. FHA
2 underwriting manuals openly insisted on racially homogenous neighborhoods, and their loans were
3 made on this basis. {With the **federal government** behind them, virtually all developers refused
4 to sell to African- Americans}.

5 Blocked from entering suburbia, why didn't African-Americans use FHA and VA loans to
6 purchase property in cities? These agencies, as well as most banks, followed a practice called
7 redlining. Neighborhoods were rated according to the risk associated with investing in them. High
8 ratings went to white areas, particularly suburbs or wealthy urban areas. The lowest ratings (red)
9 went to black, non-white, or working-class neighborhoods. Blacks were blocked from purchasing
10 homes, either in suburbia or in urban centers. Those who did already own homes in the cities were
11 unable to secure loans for home improvements. As an additional blow, the Federal government
12 began to implement urban renewal, which tore down entire neighborhoods, or separated them with
13 newly constructed railroads and freeways, leaving a blasted landscape where those who remained
14 struggled to rebuild their community. What had once been ethnic neighborhoods were now urban
15 ruins. Brodtkin comments " blacks faced an ideological assault that labeled their hoods slums, and
16 called them slumdwellers."

17 Segregation is usually associated with the Jim Crow South, but as previous examples illustrate,
18 segregation is nationwide, and the outcome of a variety of factors like homestead acts, police
19 brutality and KKK violence, immigration policies, guidelines followed by mortgage institutions,
20 and real estate development programs such as urban renewal, among others. Segregation
21 constructs whiteness in numerous dimensions. On the level of social interactions segregation
22 makes it possible for many white people to live their lives with few interactions of any kind with
23 any blacks, and often no peer or friendship relations. This isolation encourages the perpetuation of
24 racism/white supremacist ideologies, and continues the invisibility of whiteness in both cultural
25 and behavioral norms. Hale argues that segregation developed in the South to enforce the unspoken
26 belief that blacks were suited only to slavery.

27 Not only did white people continue to inhabit the "better" parts of town, but forcing all blacks to
28 use inferior facilities, meant even uneducated, poor whites could continue to feel superior to
29 educated, well-spoken blacks. Within whiteness, white people feel entitled to live in safe, clean,
30 well-maintained neighborhoods, and believe that such neighborhoods are a reflection of the quality
31 of people living in them--white people.

32 The poverty and homelessness they see on the streets as portrayed by the dominant group are the
33 only image they have of black neighborhoods, an image reinforced by the media and propaganda.
34 Property in such neighborhoods is valued below property in all white neighborhoods; or, to put it
35 another way, white neighborhoods are valued more by economic institutions, real estate agencies,
36 and certainly by white homebuyers. So, property of most blacks does not appreciate at the same
37 rates as that purchased by white people in white

38 neighborhoods, and if purchased in a changing neighborhood, may depreciate in value if more
39 white people move out.

1 In this way, racism/white supremacy is socially constructed to economically and socially benefit
2 white people, and financially and socially deprive black people. Today "white flight" and
3 suburbanization continue, but gentrification is another factor in establishing neighborhood
4 demographics. How are the economic, social, and political forces behind gentrification
5 constructing whiteness in the 21st century? This is a question that deserves to be studied!

6 With the flood of immigration beginning with the Irish Famine in (1845), the Irish began to move
7 into work traditionally performed by free blacks--industrial and service occupations such as
8 longshoring, coachmen, house servants, and waiters in restaurants. They got a start by undercutting
9 the African-American workers' wages. By the 1850s Irish had made major inroads into these
10 occupations. The lower wages may have been a start but doesn't fully explain how, by the 1860s,
11 the Irish controlled, for example, drayage and longshore work in New York City. They also had a
12 firm place in trade unions, for example, the boilermakers, masons, stone cutters, bricklayers,
13 printers, coopers, and more. In Philadelphia they dominated construction trades. However,
14 Ignatiev points out success of the Irish male workers was made possible, mainly through the U.S.
15 system of white racial privilege in immigration policies.

16 The political context for the Irishmen's climb into the skilled trades includes the increasing
17 controversy over slavery. Having lost the support of many Northern merchants and industrialists,
18 the Southern slaveholders recognized the need of obtaining Northern labor support. They enlisted
19 this support through the Democratic Party. It was anti-nativist, which attracted the Irish. But
20 together with the party's plank for an open door to immigration came a pro-slavery plank. In
21 support of slavery, the party stirred up fears that freed slaves in support of slavery, the party stirred
22 up fears that freed slaves would mobilize to take over white men's jobs. In 1844, Henry Clay of
23 Virginia gave instructions for the writing of a pamphlet to be used in his campaign for President.

24 Being freed, blacks would enter into competition with the free labor; with the American, the Irish,
25 and the German; reduce his wages; be confounded with him and reduce his moral and social
26 standing ... "As the Democratic party began to gain political power, party members were rewarded
27 through labor contracts and employment. Once the Irish had a foothold, gained through political
28 patronage or undercutting wages, they utilized various tactics to drive the remaining African-
29 American workers off the job and bring in more Irish". **African-Americans are having similar**
30 **problem with Mexican Immigration today:**

31 For example, continuing the practice began in colonial times, Irish and other European American
32 workers refused to work with black workers. This was particularly effective in driving skilled
33 black artisans and mechanics out of the trades, and during the period from 1830 to the Civil War,
34 the socioeconomic position of free blacks deteriorated, in large part because of this practice. The
35 Irish also used violence and threats of violence to force blacks out of employment. The history of
36 Irish men finding and fighting their way into unions illustrates how whiteness creates a world
37 where newcomers see two choices--become white and gain

38 economic benefits, or remain not-quite-white, with grim economic prospects, and the same
39 unenviable social position as blacks.

1 The GI Bill of Rights is another example of an invisible asset of white male workers. Brodtkin
2 describes it as "the Most Massive Affirmative-Action Program in History" --one that helped
3 European American men. The bill provided financial support during job searches, small loans for
4 starting up businesses, home loans, and financial assistance for attending colleges and technical
5 schools, including tuition and living expenses. It was enacted at the end of W.W. II when massive
6 numbers of soldiers were returning to the workforce, war production was closing down, and the
7 economic boom that would require increasing numbers of managerial, technical, and clerical
8 workers was just beginning. The bill is particularly associated with college education to hire
9 Veterans as skilled or professional workers. **African-Americans need a plan of this magnitude**
10 **right now that should come in the form of a Marshal Plan.**

11 Where to Go From Here:

12 I wrote this paper to bring awareness to the complex array of forces that comprise racism/white
13 supremacy, and that have worked together to create "white" people and then distinguish them from
14 non-white people throughout American history, and continuing today. The social construction of
15 whiteness does not proceed along only one front, but is occurring constantly in the government,
16 social, cultural, economic, political, legal, medical, military, educational, and economic arenas. I
17 have touched on only a few arenas in which whiteness is constructed: land and home ownership
18 and labor within the economic arena, the creation of a racist system of social stratification in
19 Colonial Virginia, and immigration to the U.S. within the legal arena, and all of these as supported
20 by government policies and institutions within the political arena.

21 Notably absent from this paper are examples of how racism/white supremacy is constructed and
22 maintained within schools, the judicial and penal system, electoral politics, voting, and health care.
23 And even as I refer to these various arenas, using common vocabulary that breaks our society down
24 as a whole into distinct parts, I am aware that nothing ever takes place in one arena only. **Blacks**
25 **need changes in all social institutions and areas of people activity.**

26 What remains undeniable is the inequitable distribution of wealth and income, and the inequitable
27 distribution of power, defined as the ability to influence outcome. The distribution is inequitable
28 in regard to race, and also within the "white" category (and other racial categories as well). Those
29 of us who choose to work for social justice, for a more equitable distribution of wealth, income,
30 and power, can benefit from an understanding how we have arrived to the current social system
31 that stems from racism/white supremacy.

32 As a white, middle-class woman I'm finding that my study of white privilege and the social
33 construction of white supremacy, is contrary to what many white people assume, not at all guilt
34 inducing. Rather, the more I learn, the better qualified I feel to engage with the dominant culture
35 in an effort to eliminate the system of racism/white supremacy, and **award African-Americans**
36 **Reparations to repair damages,** and enforce laws and policies to gain equality.

37 Highlighting False Perceptions and Racist Laws Responsible For,
38 Creating and Maintaining Racism/White Supremacy,
39 Brotha Pruitt