



Special Interest Articles:

- Jennifer Dillon: Theme of this February Issue
- Prayers
- Invitation to White Privilege Conference in March



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Sr. Cecilia Marie Morton, Sr. Donna Wilhelm, Sr. Dorothy Pagosa, Jennifer Dillon,
Sr. Marjorie White, Sr. Rose Grabowski, Sr. Shannon Fox
—Social Justice Committee

Racism and White Privilege *by Associate Jennifer Dillon*

I hadn't even thought about it. This issue of *We Commit Ourselves*, dedicated to revisiting the twin themes of racism and white privilege, would be coming out in February—**Black History Month**. How fitting to revisit these themes during the annual remembrance of African Americans and their contributions to history.

I want to challenge us to carry this beyond this month and beyond recalling the past. Because history is not ... history. White privilege remains in place and institutional racism has reinvented itself yet again. Chattel slavery morphed into Jim Crow laws that continued to oppress and control African Americans (book review: *Slavery by Another Name*).

In her book *The New Jim Crow*, (resource list) Michelle Alexander looks deeply at "the rebirth of a caste-like system... that has resulted in millions of African Americans locked behind bars... relegated to a permanent second-class status

(<http://newjimcrow.com/about>).” More succinctly, “We have not ended racial caste in America; we have merely redesigned it.”

Black History Month, Hispanic Heritage Month, Women's Heritage Month... I believe each of these highlight the need for us to learn about and practice ongoing efforts to dismantle privilege and oppression. I include gender because the concept of intersectionality teaches us that race, gender, class, etc. “cannot be examined in isolation... they [interconnect and] interact... and are mutually [reinforcing]” (adapted, <https://www.theprivilegeinstitute.com/>).

Further, notes author Gina Crosley-Corcoran (resource list), “...intersectionality recognizes that people can be privileged in some ways and definitely not in others.” While being mindful of this, for the sake of brevity we will focus on race privilege and oppression.

To that end, I endeavor to share my experience

(*Hungering for Justice*) at the **2018 White Privilege Conference (WPC)**.

Galatians 3:28 states: “*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*” Yet instead of seeing this as a mandate to become “color blind,” we must instead see it as the aspirational goal.

Christian author Jemar Tisby observes, “What happens when Christians relegate racism mainly to the past? Black people and other people of color continue to suffer... failure to acknowledge racism in its current forms perpetuates [it].”

In *America's Original Sin* (book review), Jim Wallis holds that, “White privilege becomes the... the idol that must be debunked, cast away, and repented of if we are to move into that new world of respecting the image of God in all God's children.” We must do the work of dismantling before we can truly be “all one in Christ.” ■

Hungering for Justice *by Jenny Dillon*

Last April I was excited to represent the SSJ-TOSF Social Justice Committee at the White Privilege Conference (WPC). I was eager to dive into this rich banquet of information, learning, and insight that I felt would nourish my commitment to social justice (SJ) and anti-racism (AR) work. I wasn't disappointed; the WPC experience

was uplifting, and I came away so energized that I danced with (over-caffeinated?) excitement on the drive home!

The WPC is “designed to examine issues of privilege..., is open to every-

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Hungering for Justice . . . (continued from page 1)

one and invites diverse perspectives to...look at...race, gender, sexuality, class, [ability]... [and] how white privilege, white supremacy, and oppression affects daily life while giving strategies for addressing [these] and advancing social and economic justice.”

(<https://www.whiteprivilegeconference.com/>)

The schedule listed a plethora of concurrent workshops ranked as beginner, intermediate and advanced.

Topics included science, healthcare, healing, faith/spirituality, culture, and skill/resource building. I struggled to narrow down my choices—I yearned to attend multiple presentations.

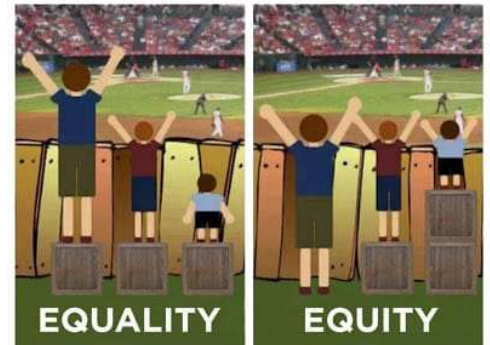
Here is some of what I learned and what struck me from a few sessions:

The Healer’s Power: How Whiteness Kills focused on how racism and Whiteness adversely impact the health of people of color (POC).

- The 40-year Tuskegee syphilis experiment illustrates the history of racism in healthcare and the resulting distrust among many African Americans: White doctors did not inform the participants they had syphilis, nor did the doctors treat the men after penicillin was known as the

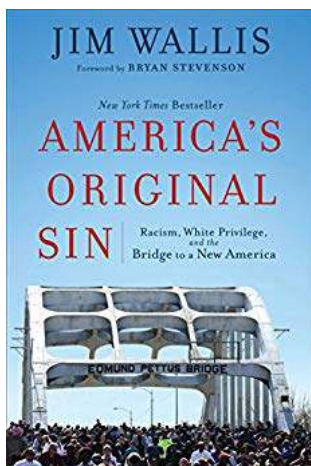
cure; many died of the disease, wives got infected, and children were born with it.

- Many barriers to healthcare equity persist, including implicit bias/stereotyping among providers. Physicians and nurses, who are predominantly White, receive little to no training on race/racism. Hope: one report noted that MDs who completed a training reported increased awareness of racism and its impact on care.
- Another important concept was the difference between **equality** (all receive the same) and **equity** (each receives what’s needed), as illustrated:



Credit: United Way of Columbia-Willamette (from The Education Trust: <https://edtrust.org/the-equity-line/equity-and-equality-are-not-equal/>)

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“America’s Original Sin”

Book Review by Sister Rose Grabowski

Jim Wallis' *America's Original Sin* is demanding and daring the Church not only to repent of the "original sin" of racism but also to join the fight against all forms of racial injustice.

This is a MUST read book.

Selected quotes:

“The good news is that our implicit biases are not fixed or permanent, and they can be changed over

time, but only by being aware and attentive to them and deliberately focusing on trying to change them.”

“As we walk across the bridge to a new America, we will make justice more possible with the changes we desire, and we will grow stronger with the rich diversity of the many cultures we can all embrace.”

“In his last book, Martin Luther King wrote,

“We are faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of NOW.” ■



*Hungering for Justice. . . (continued from page 2)***Speaking Up and Calling In: Skills to Interrupt and Challenge White Supremacy and Racism with Love and Compassion** offered several helpful and constructive insights:

- Acting with love and compassion does not mean condoning racist talk or behavior
- Say Oops or Ouch if you hear something difficult— share the discomfort
- Move away from facts to compassion; commit to learn from: listen to understand not to convince— it's not about being right but being authentic and honest
- Anger is not a "pure" emotion—it reflects hurt and frustration
- Empowered Communication concepts for dialogue:
 - Prep for conversations- How am I feeling? What makes it difficult for me to maintain love/compassion? Unchecked feelings may impact communication, impede listening;
 - Strive to be compassionate, non-judgmental with others and

yourself—recognize if your emotions are triggered and take a moment to care for yourself;

- Be curious, clarify, validate: "Say more about..."; "Did you mean...?"; "Do I hear you saying...?"
- Respect differences as assets: Inclusive reactions: "I'm glad you care about this." "That was hard, thank you for sharing that."
- It's ok not to know: "Let me think about that..."; "I don't know, I'll look into it..."
- Ask permission to give feedback: "Do you mind if I share...?"—get the "yes" to see if the person is ready to engage;
- Practice makes... better! Talk often with family, friends, neighbors, even strangers; recognize you'll never arrive/achieve perfection.

This is just a taste of the many intriguing workshops. And so many resources to browse in the main exhibition hall!

I picked up so much information, and finally bought a video that I hope SSJ-TOSF sisters and associates will utilize. ■

(See pages 4 and 6 for Resources).



What is White Privilege?

“Privilege exists when one group has something of value that is denied to others simply because of the groups they belong to, rather than because of anything they've done or failed to do.

Access to privilege doesn't determine one's outcomes, but it is definitely an asset that makes it more likely that whatever talent, ability, and aspirations a person with privilege has will result in something positive for them.”

~ Peggy McIntosh

Examples of [White] Privilege:

Being able to...

- assume that most [people who are authorities and hold historical importance] are of your race;
- assume that your failures will not be attributed to your race;
- not have to think about your race on a daily basis.

— adapted from <https://www.theprivilegeinstitute.com/>

“White Privilege is the other side of racism... It is often easier to deplore racism and its effects than to take responsibility for the privileges some of us receive as a result of it... Once we understand how white privilege operates, we can begin addressing it on an individual and institutional basis.”

~ Paula Rothenberg

“Whites need to acknowledge and work through the negative historical implications of 'Whiteness' and create for ourselves a transformed identity as White people committed to equity and social change... There are different ways of being White, and... White people [can choose] to become champions of justice and social healing.”

~ Gary Howard

Prayers

“We are Franciscans
seeking to build,
empower, bond,
and speak.”



Oh God, we pray that you will stir the waters, and agitate the sleepers of our world, who would rather justify injustice than fight against it. And give your people— your young warriors and crying mothers and broken fathers— the courage to accept nothing less than life. Help us to stand for truth, justice and righteousness. Give us courage to make our witness against injustice in deep and abiding love. Amen.

~ Adapted from “A Collective Prayer for Ferguson,” compiled and edited by Pastor Renita Marie

Spirit of Life and Compassion,
In these times when we are tempted
to lose hope through isolation,
to see our efforts as pointless,
to feel only fragility and tears,
to allow our desires for justice and healing
to die prematurely in our hearts...

Spark us to re-imagine
resurrection, equity, contemplation, action, solidarity, joy, generosity,
music and acceptance and dancing and creativity and resilience.

May we find optimism together,
may we see our labors as meaningful,
may we feel our strength and laughter
may we allow our cravings for justice and healing
to re-birth your Kin-dom in our hearts...

Energize us to continue
to confront the -ism challenges,
to struggle against the oppression of unearned privileges
and to recognize our true identities as Known and Beloved.

~ jenny dillon



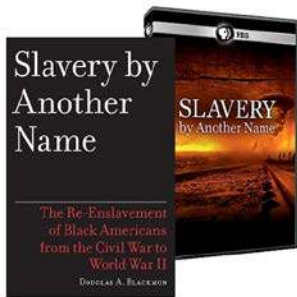
A very incomplete selection of RESOURCES:

- *White Privilege 101: Getting in on the Conversation*, CD and study guide, available through Sister Dorothy Pagosa (video also available online)
- Study Guide (updated edition) for the book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color-blindness*, by Michelle Alexander
- <https://www.theprivilegeinstitute.com/>
- Journal: Understanding and Dismantling Privilege www.wpcjournal.com
- *Everyday White People Confront Racial & Social Injustice: 15 Stories*, by Eddie Moore, Jr and Marguerite Penick-Parks
- <https://www.whiteprivilegeconference.com/>
- *Privilege, Power and Difference*, by Allan Johnson
- *Privilege: A Reader*, edited by Michael S. Kimmel and Abby L. Ferber
- *White Privilege: Essential Readings on the Other Side of Racism*, edited by Paula Rothenberg
- *Explaining White Privilege to a Broke White Person*, by Gina Crosley-Corcoran
- *Witnessing Whiteness: First Steps Toward an Antiracist Practice and Culture*, by Shelly Tochluk

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Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II

By Douglas A. Blackmon, *Review by Sister Donna Wilhelm and Jenny Dillon (book and documentary)*



In *Slavery by Another Name*, journalist Blackmon documents events in the life of Green Cottenham, the youngest child born to former slaves. Cottenham's experiences are illustrative of what Jim Crow perpetrated on millions of African Americans. The book follows Cottenham from his "capture" for standing around or vagrancy—the inability to prove being employed at a time of vast unemployment—which was recriminalized post Emancipation. To reduce costs and increase profits, state and county governments "leased" convicts, mostly Black men, ostensibly so

they could pay costs and fines associated with their convictions. They were handed over to local farmers and large corporations, who had little incentive to treat them well. Cottenham's sentence to hard labor brought about his ultimate death as he was forced to work in the deplorable conditions of an Alabama coal mine.

Blackmon believes that the "Jim Crow segregation" period in US history should be renamed "The Age of Neoslavery." To support this, the author meticulously recounts the growth of neoslavery. Chattel slavery, the linchpin of the US economy, was ended by the 13th Amendment. Simultaneously, post-Civil War growth in coal, steel, lumber and other industries required workers.

Blackmon shows the rapid development in the "purchase" of Black laborers. He traces two characteristics of the neoslavery system: 1) the increase in "criminals" at the time when more workers

were needed; 2) the belief that Black people have a higher rate of criminal behavior in "their nature."

We have all seen images of "chain gangs." We might not realize that these individuals by-and-large were not violent criminals. These workers, sometimes shackled together 24 hours a day, toiled under concentration camp like conditions, "working off" debts related to trumped up charges.

Green Cottenham, like many hundreds of his fellows, was buried in an unmarked grave in a forgotten cemetery near Mine 12. "Here and in scores of other similarly crude graveyards," notes Blackmon, "the final chapter of American slavery had been buried."

This isn't an easy read. Blackmon has done extensive historical research, winning a Pulitzer Prize for his work. The book is important, however, because it provides a foundational historical context for the continued stereotypes and prejudices of racism that must be unearthed. ■



FEBRUARY: BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Black History Month, also known as African-American History Month in the U.S., is an annual observance in Canada, Ireland, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States. It began as a way for remembering important people and events in the history of the African diaspora.

[Wikipedia](#)





Resources . . . (continued from page 4)

- *Trouble I've Seen: Changing the Way the Church Views Racism*, by [Drew G. I. Hart](#)
- *Healing Justice Podcast*, Hosted by Kate Werning; Episode 14: "Ancestral Healing for Anti-Racist White Folks" with Jardana Peacock and Kelly Germaine-Strickland
- *White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son*, book and video by Tim Wise
- *America's Original Sin: Racism, White Privilege, and the Bridge to a New America*, by Jim Wallis
- *Repenting of America's Original sin: A Six-Part Discussion Guide for America's Original Sin* by Jim Wallis
- *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*, by [Robin DiAngelo](#) ■

"Stemming from our Franciscan values and the fact that all life is interconnected, members, vowed and non-vowed, are encouraged to be engaged in ministry with those living on the margins of society and struggling to live with dignity."

SSJ-TOSF Congregational Commitments
26th General Chapter

A **belated** Message from the Social Justice Committee:

Happy Valentine's Day

And may you each have a **Blessed Lent...**!

An Invitation from WPC (White Privilege Conference):

WPC: Understanding, Respecting, & Connecting

The WPC strives to empower and equip individuals to work for equity and justice through self and social transformations.

Please join us in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, for a special 20th anniversary celebration!

Wednesday, March 20–Saturday, March 23, 2019

Registration now open

<https://www.whiteprivilegeconference.com/registration-information>

REMEMBER...

We welcome your submissions in the form of

- "Sightings"
- Brief write-ups of your activities, "prototypes," suggestions for workshops, books, articles, films, resources.

Please send these to Sister Marge White by March 15th (the Ides of March) for inclusion in the April issue of our newsletter, *We Commit Ourselves*.

~Your Social Justice Committee