

# An Introduction to the Work of United to End Racism

Groups of humans have been oppressed in variety of ways throughout much of human history. Racism, one form of oppression, has existed for many centuries. Racism shapes and perpetuates the inequities of our societies and has become a part of our societal institutions.

Racism is an integral part of our societies. It is not just an aberration of some small collection of people. To end racism, policies must change, racist behavior must stop, the injustices from racism must be redressed, and all people must recover from the damage done to them by racism.

Racism is the one-way, institutionalized mistreatment of Africans, Indigenous peoples, Asians, Chicanos/Chicanas, Mestizos/Mestizas, Arabs, and others and their descendants—people of color. These are the groups of people targeted by racism. Racism conditions people of European descent—white people—to act as agents of this mistreatment. All people are deeply hurt by racism. However, this system—of unequal access to the resources of society supported by violence, threats of violence, misinformation, lies, isolation, and greed—is directed at people targeted by racism and carried out by white people.

Again, one group is targeted by racist institutions and another is conditioned to act as the agent of racist oppression. This targeting has destroyed and damaged the lives of hundreds of millions of people, through slavery, apartheid, and racial discrimination in many forms. This conditioning has also deeply corrupted the lives of those who have been conditioned to act as agents of racism.

No group or individual should ever be targeted by racism. No characteristic, real or imagined, justifies racism. Those who have been targeted by racism comprise the vast majority of the human population. They are from a

multitude of rich and vibrant cultures, cultures that have produced many of the best achievements of our species. There has never been, nor can there be, any rational justification of racism.

Although racism is aimed at particular sections of the population, it corrodes and corrupts the entire society, severely limiting society's progress. It also limits the progress of every individual in that society toward a full and meaningful life.

The work to end racist behavior undertaken by those who have been conditioned to be *agents* of racism, is an important part of the work of United to End Racism. It is vital to the progress of all humans that those of us who have been conditioned by society to act as agents of racism make the ending of racism our goal. Racism has corrupted our lives, and it is in our interest that it be ended as quickly as possible.

The struggle to understand racism and to take action to eliminate it has progressed sufficiently that we can believe that racism will be ended in this century. People in many places have interrupted the worst manifestations of racism (such as slavery and apartheid) and have begun to secure broad agreement on policies to root out racism from many of society's institutions.

To end racism, it is vital that we remove racist policies from our institutions and ensure fair and just conditions of life for all. Accomplishing this will save future generations from the damage done to past generations. It is also vital to heal the damage done to individuals by racism. Healing this damage is not the same as ending racist policies. *Only by healing the damage done to individuals can we be confident that racist attitudes and behaviors will not continue and that racist policies will not reappear in other guises.*

**To fully eliminate racism, we must heal three forms of damage.**

The first form is the damage done to individuals targeted by racism—the hurts from being treated as inferior, denied basic material needs, denied a fair share of resources, demeaned, attacked, threatened with destruction, and much more. This damage is done to individuals through their contact with society's institutions and by the actions of other individuals.

The second form is the damage to members of targeted groups from having “internalized” racism. Racist attitudes can be so overpowering that they are absorbed by people targeted by racism. Racism shapes the way people targeted by racism think and feel about themselves. It can make people mistreat themselves (and other members of their group) in ways that are similar to the mistreatment they have received from the agents of oppression. People end up mistreating themselves and each other. We call this “internalized” racism.

The third form of damage is the corruption of the minds and spirits of those conditioned by society to act as the agents of racism (i.e., white people). No one is born an agent of racism. No one is born with a racist attitude. Anyone with a racist attitude has first been mistreated and misinformed. He or she has been conditioned to play that role.

Although individuals of the oppressor group are accorded more rights and better material lives than people in the oppressed group, their lives and minds are corrupted by racism. Racism damages *everyone*. It is in no one's real human interest.

**All three forms of damage can be healed.**

Even under the most severe racist oppression, people are able to move forward simply through the force of their own thinking and determination. However, unless they recover from the emotional hurts of racism, they continue to

carry the effects of those hurts, and their thinking and behavior are affected by them. These hurts weigh heavily on them personally; they also slow the work to bring about institutional change. Unhealed, racism limits and damages everyone's abilities to think and work cooperatively and limits our capacity to end the other forms of oppression in our societies. It makes the work and lives of those fighting institutionalized racism more difficult. In contrast, when people can heal from the effects of racism on them, they find it easier to work together, building strong alliances within their own liberation movement and between all liberation movements.

If all racist behavior stopped immediately and racist policies were removed, the damage from past racism would not disappear. For those of us who are targeted, feelings—feeling attacked, worthless, mistreated, ignored, doubting of ourselves—would continue to confuse us and erode our lives. For those of us trained by society to act as the agents of racism, the damage of having been conditioned to believe and act on the basis of racism (for example, feeling that one's own group is superior, feeling fear or discomfort around people targeted by racism) would also continue. It would confuse and corrupt both our thinking and behavior and lead to the re-appearance of racist policies and actions.

The work of United to End Racism is to remove the damage done to individuals by racism. Both for people targeted by racism and for white people, healing from racism involves releasing the emotional tensions left from early hurtful experiences in our lives. When we are allowed and encouraged to tell fully the stories of how racism has affected us, with others listening and giving their full attention, we will begin to heal. When we are able not only to recount the facts of these stories, but also to allow ourselves to feel and show what it was like personally—feel and express the rage, grief, or terror—we become

increasingly free of the damage of racism. All the emotional effects of racism can be healed if the person is given enough time, attention, and understanding.

Healing from mistreatment is not easy work. Many of us resist it, even though without this healing, the rage, grief and terror from the past continue to affect us. We may feel that we have been able to persist in life only by numbing ourselves and holding inside how we were hurt. It may seem unbearable to look at and feel those hurts again—perhaps because for so long most of us had no opportunity to tell our stories. Some of us believe that we are no longer hurting since we continued to function in our lives, often very well, after the incidents of mistreatment. We mistakenly believe that we “got over it.” Or we unawarely accept the idea that it is impossible to heal fully from racism.

From our work in UER, we now know that it is possible for us to get completely free of the damage done by racism. We know that all of us are capable of freeing ourselves. We know that the apparently unbearable feelings do not persist once the healing process begins. And we find that once we begin healing from these hurts, we can think more clearly and act more powerfully in the work to end racism. Healing from the effects of racism is not a substitute for organizing and taking action against institutional racism, but we in UER have found it to be a vital part of the work to end racism.

### UNITED TO END RACISM

United to End Racism (UER) is a group of people of many racial groups and all ages and backgrounds in many different countries who are dedicated to eliminating racism in the world. We understand that the elimination of racism is necessary for humankind to progress. We are committed to ending racism, and we support the efforts of other groups to accomplish this goal.

United to End Racism is a project of the Re-evaluation Counseling Communities, and all of the members of UER have learned and use the theory and tools of Re-evaluation Counseling. Re-evaluation Counseling (RC) has existed since the early 1950's, and the RC Communities have directly taken on the work of eliminating racism since the 1970's. In the late 1990's the RC Communities decided to make the elimination of racism central to their work, and subsequently United to End Racism was created.

The main work of UER is to illuminate the damage done to individuals by racism and to undo this damage on an individual basis, using the resources and process of Re-evaluation Counseling. As people do this work, they become better able:

- to interrupt racism in their daily lives,
- to free themselves from all of racism's effects,
- to take leadership,
- to form deep relationships across racial lines,
- to remove racism from our societies' institutions, and
- to support the work of other individuals and organizations in ending racism.

United to End Racism offers both an ongoing support system that assists people to sustain their efforts to eliminate racism, and effective tools for the elimination of racism that can be taught and used on a one-to-one basis.

## United to End Racism

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