

Communities for Anti-Racist Learning and Action

I used to think...

I used to think that the antidote to racism was kindness and acceptance --often called tolerance-- for people who are different. (*Different from what?* I didn't even think about that. Different from White, if I'm being honest, but Whiteness was so normal for me, I couldn't even see it as a thing. On that note, I also thought that *White Supremacy* was southerners in robes.)

Now I think...

Now I think that while it's wonderful to be kind to others, the choice *not* to be kind isn't racism: at best it's plain rudeness and at worst it's bigotry. Now I think that White Supremacy is a system built to privilege, center and normalize Whiteness and consider everyone else as *other*. And now I think the antidote to racism is policy change. But like any good student of public policy, I know that before that can happen, we must change hearts and minds.

CARLA

Community for Anti Racist Learning and Action

Learn the history that led us to this inequitable present, and identify your role in making a change.



Talking about race, dealing with shame and understanding what it means to be anti-racist.



Housing, home ownership and community planning



Identifying your privilege and recognizing affirmative action for White people



Reparations: what it means and what it could look like.



Mass Incarceration, Voter Suppression and the Criminal-Legal System



Cultural Appropriation: What is it and what's the problem?



Critical Race Theory: What is it? What is it not?

Where you have privilege, you have power. Use it for good.

The Summer of George Floyd

Over 20 years in the public schools and communities in the Bronx, Oakland and San Diego made me question the likelihood that these neighborhoods could really possibly have that many bad and lazy people in them. They certainly had a lot of cops, incarcerated relatives and poverty. My neighbors didn't seem bad and lazy when I saw them at the grocery store, school events or on the bus. My kids didn't seem bad and lazy when they were revising their work, checking their homework or contributing to their reading groups.

For years I'd heard friends of color (and people of color who are not necessarily my friends) say that *White people need to learn their history*. It resonated with me, but I didn't quite know what to do with it.

In the summer of 2020, in response to an article called [When black people are in pain, white people just join book clubs](#), I invited a bunch of friends to join me on Zoom (*Remember when that was the only way to see our friends?*) to join me in what eventually became CARLA. Our Community for Anti Racist Learning and Action deliberately tried to emphasize *action*. Over 12 months, we covered Housing, Education, Voting Rights, Policing, the Prison system, talking about race and dealing with shame, Cultural Appropriation and Critical Race Theory--what it is, and isn't.

I left every one of our calls inspired by what we'd all supported each other in grappling, disclosing and reflecting on together.

CARLAs in schools

Recently I was asked what I would say to a school leader who felt stuck about what to do with a school plagued by achievement gaps, high absenteeism, low graduation rates, struggling families, high FRL numbers and low literacy proficiency. I would say two things:

- 1) Go to the schoolyard and play with a few students. Just play. And notice their full spectrum of humanity.
- 2) Connect your teachers and staff with the resources to help them understand the policies and design decisions that have crafted a system that delivers precisely the results intended. Ground them in shared understandings of basic vocabulary and concepts and find a framework that will serve as a lens to see through. For the CARLAs I've facilitated, that's been the work of Ibram X Kendi. And then, dig into the content, topic by topic.

Shifts

With consistency over the course of the year, we discussed readings, podcasts and films, sharing reflections in the “I used to think and now I think” format. This helped us build trust because we could express vulnerability in the context of our growth, so it felt good to share.

There were a few noticeable changes in mindsets I’ve observed:

- Poverty is not a moral failure on behalf of the poor, but rather that of our policies.
- This is designed to be this way. So we can design it differently.
- We ALL have more to learn, reflect on and grow. People of Color and White people alike are all perpetrators *and* victims of the limiting effects of racism to different degrees-- we breathe it in every day.
- Individuals and systems are different beasts, and should not be considered the same way.

Internalizing these realities can have a significant impact on the way we--all of us-- approach people impacted by poverty--which is arguably critical for schools to do in order to truly empower students to lead us.