DISMANTLING ANTI-BLACK BIAS IN DEMOCRATIC WORKPLACES: A TOOLKIT

AORTA

anti-oppression resource and training alliance

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DISMANTLING ANTI-BLACK BIAS IN DEMOCRATIC WORKPLACES: A TOOLKIT
AORTA: ANTI-OPPRESSION RESOURCE AND TRAINING ALLIANCE

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INTRODUCTION

When we participate in a democratic workplace or collective, we take on the incredible responsibility of shaping an institution -- and we therefore have incredible power to resist the harmful cultures, practices, and policies that reinforce anti-Black racism in mainstream institutions. But the persistent messages that we receive about anti-Blackness can just as easily infiltrate our workplaces if we're not dedicated to building a shared vision for collective liberation that centers Black liberation and self-determination.

Our goal in creating this packet is to equip democratic workplaces with tools to see and address anti-Black racism when it happens, as well as creating systems and practices that undermine anti-Black racism.

It is critical that we both welcome those new to understanding and resisting anti-Black racism, and honor the struggle of those who have been working toward Black liberation for generations. Tamika Mallory, co-chair of the Women's March on Washington held on January 21, 2017, shares her perspective on doing this work as a Black woman:

> "Today is not a concert. It is not a parade, and it is not a party. Today is an act of resistance. Now, some of you came here to protest one man. I didn't come here for that. I came here to address those of you who say you are of good conscience. To those of you who experience a feeling of being powerless, disparaged, victimized, antagonized, threatened and abused, to those of you who for the first time felt the pain that my people have felt since they were brought here with chains shackled on our legs, today I say to you, welcome to my world. Welcome to our world. I stand here as a Black woman, the descendent of slaves. My ancestors literally nursed our slave masters. Through the blood and tears of my people, we built this country. America cannot be great without me, you and all of us who are here today. Today you may be feeling aggrieved, but know that this country has been hostile to its people for a long time. For some of you, it is new. For some of us, it is not so new at all."
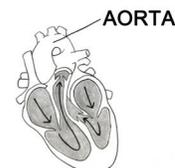
HOW TO USE THIS PACKET

This packet is a learning guide that includes activities, resources, writings, and prompts for further reflection and growth. We invite you to use the various components in this packet for individual learning and development, as well as in your organizations, study groups, co-ops and workplaces.

Tailoring activities and learnings to your specific group always helps ensure that you are engaged in the most relevant and effective work. To decide how to best use these modules, read through each activity and reflect on the following:

- What reactions do you have? What resonates with you?

- What key lessons might you or your group gain from this activity?

- How might the racial makeup of your group impact what it feels like to do this activity? How might other identities (ethnicity, class, age, country of origin, religion) of your group members inform this activity? Are there any adaptations you might make to ensure that it is relevant for your group?

- Are there terms or phrases used in an activity that aren't the right fit for your group? How might you slightly adapt or change terms, phrases, or contexts so this activity makes more sense for your group?

- How might you connect the learning from this activity to something concrete in your co-op or organization? Are there ways that an activity might support policy development, strengthen interpersonal relationships, or stoke ideas for changes to culture and practices? Having some ideas about how this big picture learning will help dismantle anti-Black bias in your co-op or organization will ensure that these activities are effective and action-oriented.

Important: Acknowledge that it's likely that members of your group are in different places.
The ability to recognize and name anti-Black bias is a skill and knowledge base like any other skill or knowledge base. Not all members can write up quarterly financial reports, and not all members can easily recognize anti-Black bias in action.

It can be helpful as you embark on a this process together to ask your group to create structures that honor and utilize the skill and expertise of those members who are able to recognize and identify anti-Black bias at individual, institutional, and cultural levels. This will both help value the work of the members bringing these skills to the group, and enhance the quality of the work your co-op does.

Many of these discussions and exercises are painful, vulnerable, and may contain a wide depth of emotions. This resource packet is intended to support you to assess when and how these activities can offer inspiration. Sometimes jumping into a deep activity too swiftly, or when there is unaddressed tension in a group can lead to a loss of trust or further harm. Or, engaging in an activity when you don't have adequate time to ease in and ease out of it can leave people feeling raw and uncared for. Ensuring that you build in adequate time to work your way up to the activity, as well as time for debriefing and reflection are always important components to consider -- we've offered suggested times for each activity so you can make good decisions.
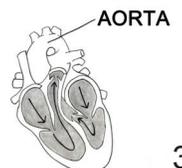
To help you assess which activity to choose and how, we've developed a key, below, that offers a bit of guidance:

    This activity can be also be done as a self-reflection exercise

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    Do this once you've built some trust with the group

    Proceed with caution and care: can unearth deep emotions and requires confident facilitation skills to responsibly hold the group.

These considerations will hopefully empower you to adapt or choose what to focus on in each activity. And in the spirit of collaboration and growth, we are always interested to learn what changes you make and how these activities work in your co-op or organization. We welcome ideas and updates to be sent to info@aorta.coop.
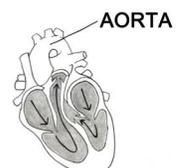
ANTI-BLACK RACISM: EARLY LEARNINGS AND SOCIALIZATION
FACILITATOR GUIDE: HOW TO USE THIS HANDOUT

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Recommended length of time: 45-70 minutes

Goal: Reflect on and begin to deconstruct our socialized and internalized beliefs about Blackness.

What you will need:
- Two sheets of butcher paper & markers
- Anti-Black Racism: Early Learnings and Socialization Handout (enough copies for each participant)

Introduce the exercise. (5 minutes)
Outline the steps below. Note that we are not born with racial bias; we start learning these things as babies. The bias that we learn at an early age often becomes part of our worldview, which sometimes makes it hard to notice.

Journaling. (5-10 minutes)
Ask participants to spend 5-10 minutes writing down their responses to the discussion questions on the handout.

Sharing. (10-15 minutes)
Divide the group into pairs or triads. Ask people to share what they want to about their experiences, along with anything else that feels important.

Reflect. (2 minutes)
Ask people to take a minute to themselves to reflect: Is there anything you learned? Any important takeaways?

Whole group debrief. (15-30 minutes)
Put up two sheets of flipchart paper. One one, record two categories of information: positive messages about Blackness and negative messages about Blackness. On the other, record key takeaways.

Potential Debrief Questions:
- How was that?
- Are there things you want to share with the group? (a-ha moments, things that others may learn from)
- What messages did you receive?
- What did you notice or learn?
- Which of these messages is more often reinforced? (How? By whom?)
- How does this compare to what/when you learned about white people?
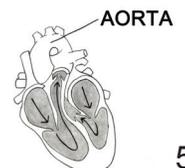
- What comes up for you, seeing these all up there?

Recap. (5 minutes)
- Recap key outcomes of the discussion. Some key lessons will likely be:
- We learn from: family, education system, media.
- We are socialized into the values of our culture, which then play out into our actions and the values of our organizations, most often without our intent, or our conscious awareness.
- Deconstructing anti-Blackness involves unlearning and re-learning.
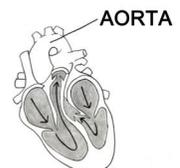
ANTI-BLACK RACISM: EARLY LEARNINGS AND SOCIALIZATION

Instructions for Participants
Try and find at least one memory for each category. Note your age and something to help you remember the moment, such as a phrase, drawing, symbol, or journal passage.

Early/first memories you have of learning positive things about Blackness & Black people (from family, media, friends, teachers, etc.)	Early/first memories you have of learning negative things about Blackness & Black people (from family, media, friends, teachers, etc.)
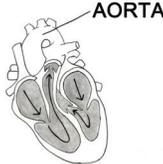
MAPPING ANTI-BLACK RACISM: LEVELS
FACILITATOR GUIDE: HOW TO USE THIS HANDOUT

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Goal: Build collective understanding of anti-Black racism as a system that operates at three levels: Interpersonal/individual, Institutional, and Cultural.

Recommended length of time: 60-75 minutes

What you will need:
- Butcher paper split into three sections marked individual/interpersonal, institutional, cultural (incorporate imagery in "The big picture" section.)
- Mapping Anti-Black Racism Handout (enough copies for each participant)

Define Anti-Black Racism. (5-10 minutes)
 "If there's one thing missing in our country, it's an acknowledgment of the broad humanity of Black folks. Racism—and anti-Black racism in particular—is the belief that there's something wrong with Black people." —Ta-Nehisi Coates
Add to this: It's about Blackness as well, it underlies the Black/white racial dichotomy we have in the US, and then situations brown folks on that spectrum. It involves systemic historical, cultural, political, and economic violence.
We will talk more about anti-Blackness after mapping it out further.

The big picture. (5 minutes)
Explain that when we examine any system of oppression we can look at it as operating at three levels - unfurl butcher paper.

We suggest using images that have three different levels, such as a plant (roots, stem, flowers) or an iceberg (bottom section, middle section, tip of the iceberg), but feel free to get creative with your image. To explain this metaphor further, we'll use the example of a plant. Spend this time sharing "the big picture" by slowly and concisely walking participants through the image you've drawn - provide one example for each section so that people understand how this visual metaphor will work. You'll explore and generate more examples later. Explain that systemic oppression operates at three levels and each component of the plant represents one of those levels:

The roots represent cultural values of that system of oppression. These values can be challenging to name because they are painful and not our own personal values. Cultural values are beliefs, assumptions, and logics of a system of oppression. Share an example of a cultural value of anti-Black racism: i.e. white people are considered to be safe and helpful citizens, while Black people are considered to be dangerous, violent, and threatening to society; or, meritocracy -- if you are smart and hard working you will achieve success.

The stem of the plant represents Institutional ways that a system of oppression operates. Institutions are things like schools, health care, public transportation, banks, prisons and policing, non-profits, co-ops, and many more. Share an example of institutional anti-Black racism: i.e. redlining to keep neighborhoods segregated and mitigate the accumulation of wealth in Black
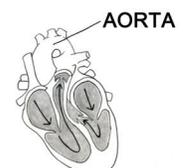
communities; or cash bail that disproportionately keeps poor and working class Black and brown people locked up before a trial.

The flowers of the plant represents ways that Individuals perpetuate oppression. There are many examples that span levels of violence and intent: making assumptions about Black people that are reliant on racist stereotypes; making anti-Black jokes; crossing the street when a Black man is walking towards you; enacting violence on someone because they are Black.

You might want to demonstrate how an example from each category connects to the next. For instance: the cultural value that Black people are more violent and dangerous supports the reason for aggressive policing and incarceration of Black communities, which acts as a logic for why someone might cross the street if a Black man is walking towards them.

Build on your foundation. (5 minutes)
If you did the early learnings and socialization exercise, ask group to identify items that were shared earlier and add a few examples from this handout. Before ending each section, ask folks if there are any that feel important to them that they want to share. Write these into the butcher.

Deepen understanding. Fill out section marked "Institutional." (10 minutes)
Briefly discuss how anti-Black racism is both different from and connected to other forms of oppression.
Slavery is the historical basis of our economy. The structure of the economy is rooted in slavery. (economic necessity)
Our Constitution was written by slave owners. They managed to muster some pretty nice language about equality, justice, and freedom for "men" because they considered Africans less than human.
"Fear of Black people drives our national politics"
Share that we understand systems of oppression are held in our institutions also (see handout for more language). Ask the group to name some institutions. Take turns reading off the examples in the handout. Ask the group for a few more and write these into eh butcher marked institutional.

Address cultural values. (15 minutes)
After speaking to the role of culture and values in shaping our institutions and our interpersonal behaviors, ask the group to take turns reading from the section of the handout marked "Cultural." Ask participants to pair up and see if they have any more to add. Fill out section on butcher marked "Cultural."

Clarify.
All these levels are in relationship to one another. We cannot hope to see change happen without an approach that is thinking at these levels.

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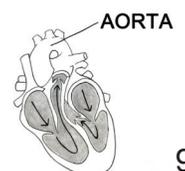
Develop a vision. (15-25 minutes)
In pairs or small groups, take a look at the handout along with the positive and negative messages that we mapped out earlier. Come up with two visionary ideas for how we can change those messages and begin to shift anti-Black bias. Note: The messages we have received and internalized of anti-Blackness are hundreds of years old, and it is not easy to shift this thinking. This is why the messages of "Black is Beautiful" and "Black Lives Matter" are so powerful and transformative.

Draw the connection. (5 minutes)
The reason we are focusing so much on individual bias and socialization is because within a democratic workplace, you have institutional power. You shape the institution.
In a democratic workplace, any piece of this that has stuck in you, becomes institutionalized into institutional anti-Black racism the moment you begin to evaluate and vote as an owner.
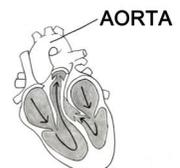
MAPPING ANTI-BLACK RACISM: LEVELS

INDIVIDUAL

The individual level refers to the words, actions, behaviors, and beliefs of individual people. We often have a tendency to minimize anti-Black racism to something that happens at only an individual level, ignoring the systemic and cultural layers. (ie: Police departments minimizing systemic police violence against the Black community as "a few bad apples.") Often, when our own words, actions, etc are guided and influenced by anti-Black racism, we have a very hard time seeing this (especially when feel we are well intended). This means we have a duty to take it seriously when others do us the great gift of helping us see and understand how our actions may be harmful.

- Statements like "You are a credit to your race."
- Asking a Black person: "Why do you have to be so loud/animated? Just calm down."
- Denying Black folks' racial experiences. "Everyone can succeed in this society, if they work hard enough." "When I look at you, I don't see color."
- Mistaking a Black person in a store for a service workers, on the street for a panhandler, burglar, etc.
- Not smiling or greeting Black folks on the street. Frowning at Black children as they play and act like children.
- Socialization to fear: Crossing the street, locking the door, grabbing your purse as a Black person walks towards you.
- Not coming directly to a Black co-worker with difficult conversations or hard feedback.
- Accusing or assuming Black folks of being hostile, intimidating, angry, or aggressive.
- Assuming and/or treating Black children as if they are much older than they are, expecting them to act much older, or denying them childhood.
- Expecting Black co-workers to do the hard work of bringing up or addressing discrimination and racism in the workplace when it arises.
- Expecting or nominating Black folks to do the "diversity" work: to sit on committees, and take on "diversity" work in addition to (and often outside the scope of) a full job description and workload.

INSTITUTIONAL

Institutions are neither good nor bad; they just are. Institutions are things like: the government, corporations, social justice non-profits, cooperatives, families, places of worship. This level refers to the ways that institutions maintain and create systemic anti-Black racism. Examples of this can be conscious: intentional policies, laws, actions (which is what we often think about). Also included in the institutional level are the results of the default patterns and ways that institutions operate. These are usually unconscious, and are no less powerful or impactful.

Institutions often work as strong forces in socializing individuals. Institutions are also made of individuals, and so can be shaped and transformed us. Institutions both help to create cultural values and stories, and are influenced by them.

- Instructing sales personnel to follow Black folk to make sure they don't steal.
- A Black child born today is less likely to be raised by both parents than a Black child born during slavery. (From The New Jim Crow, Michelle Alexander). The recent disintegration
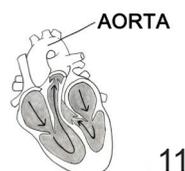
of the African-American family is due in large part to the mass imprisonment of Black people.

- An estimated 5.3 million Americans have currently or permanently lost their right to vote because of felony convictions. But for Black men, the rate is 7 times the national average. (From the New Jim Crow, Michelle Alexander). These men are part of a growing under-caste–not class, caste–permanently relegated, by law, to a second-class status. They can be denied the right to vote, automatically excluded from juries, and legally discriminated against in employment, housing, and access to education, and public benefits, much as their grandparents and great-grandparents were during the Jim Crow era. *

- The wealth gap between white and Black households keeps growing, with the average white family now owning over 7.5 times as much wealth as the average Black family. Tax breaks for homeowners, retirement savings, employer-sponsored health insurance, and capital gains contribute to widening this gap. *

- For nearly 70 years, Black people have had two times the unemployment rate of white people in the U.S — even when the economy is strong.*

- According to the 2011 National Transgender Discrimination Survey, 38% of Black trans-gender and gender nonconforming people who interacted with the police reported harass-ment; 14% reported physical assault, and 6% sexual assault.

- A study published in The American Economic Review titled "Are Emily and Greg More Employable than Lakisha and Jamal?" found that applicants with Black-sounding names received 50% fewer callbacks than those with white-sounding names.

CULTURAL

The cultural level refers to dominant cultural stories and values that allow anti-Black racism to exist without great public outrage. These are usually values and stories that we do not want to personally hold. However, they are also the values and stories that we were socialized into, and that are the underlying messages we receive through things like the news, media, movies, interpersonal interactions, etc. It can be helpful for us to identify them so that we can interrogate how our personal actions are influenced by these stories and values. Importantly, while culture influences institutions and individuals, institutions and individuals also create and transform cultural stories.

- The cultural story that white folks are safer, less violent, and better citizens (prominently communicated through mainstream media), and Black folks are dangerous, violent, and poor citizens.

- Cultural and historical narratives that teach us to associate white European cultures with "civilization," "order," and "advancement" and people of color cultures with "primitive," "backwards," and "chaos/violence."

- In English, "white" is associated with "clean," "pure," and "good" while "Black" is associated with "dirty," "disgraced," and "evil."

- The notion that the values and communication styles of the dominant / white culture are ideal, and that all others should assimilate to dominant culture.

- The myth of meritocracy-- that we all start from a "level playing field" and therefore if you have wealth, you "earned" and "deserve" it and if you didn't, it's because you didn't work hard enough or didn't want it enough.

From the Movement for Black Lives Policy Platform. https://policy.m4bl.org/platform/
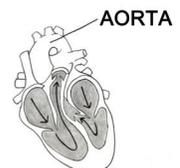
ANTI-BLACK BIAS IN THE WORKPLACE: SHIFTING OUR PRACTICES, CULTURE, AND THE BIG PICTURE
FACILITATOR GUIDE: HOW TO USE THIS HANDOUT

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Goal: Begin to develop ways to address anti-Black racism in the workplace, and understand how this work can benefit your workplace.

Recommended length of time: 70 - 90 minutes

We recommend using the World Café methodology to facilitate this piece: www.theworldcafe.com/key-concepts-resources/world-cafe-method/

Prep: Set up four stations: Monitoring and Evaluations, Customer Service, Shifting Cultures, and Cooperative Economics. Each station will get a flipchart paper with the title and a vertical dividing line in the middle. On one side write "Reflections" on the other write "Action Ideas."

Split the participants into 4 groups. (5 minutes)

Rotate Stations. Each group gets 12 minutes at each station, before it rotates. Then move them to the next station. Each group will ideally visit 3 stations. (45 minutes)

Explain the instructions below, providing examples for each category.
Instructions:
- We are going to take this knowledge and awareness and apply it critically to your co-op.
- Take a few minutes to read through the quotes, and reference your own experience in the workplace.
- Then as a group discuss the questions, and take notes of the key findings.
- You'll have about 12 minutes on each station, and you'll visit three of the four.
- We'll have some time at the end to hear back what you came up with.

Report back. Take some time to hear what came up at each station. (20 minutes)
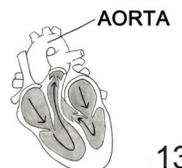
ANTI-BLACK BIAS IN THE WORKPLACE: SHIFTING OUR PRACTICES, CULTURE, AND THE BIG PICTURE

MONITORING AND EVALUATIONS

"You are routinely accused of being hostile, aggressive, difficult and/or angry. You are told that your colleagues/students/co-workers/customers are intimidated by you and are afraid to approach you. You are encouraged in evaluations to "smile more," and "be more friendly." You fear that your resting face pose makes people think you are mean."

Ten microaggressions commonly experienced by Black folk in the workplace
Blogger "Rboylorn" – Crunk Feminist Collective

"African American employees tend to receive more scrutiny from their bosses than their white colleagues, meaning that small mistakes are more likely to be caught, which over time leads to worse performance reviews and lower wages. The (Boston University) researchers …observe that the pool of unemployed Black workers is likely to be seen as less skilled because of more consistent or prolonged unemployment. This leads employers to invest more heavily in monitoring Black employees. Because Black workers are more closely scrutinized, it increases the chances that errors—large or small—will be caught.

According to the researchers it's more likely that a Black employee would be let go for these errors than a white one. Thus another way of looking at the findings, Lang says, is that Blacks simply don't get a second chance."

Black Workers Really Do Need to Be Twice as Good
Gillian B. White - The Atlantic, Oct 7, 2015

- In what ways does anti-Black racism affect how you monitor, train, and evaluate your co-workers?
- What changes could you make that would challenge this?

CUSTOMER SERVICE

"A popular African American comedian took to the Internet on Thursday to complain that an employee of the Elmwood Café on College Avenue told him to "scram," or words to that effect, Monday while he was talking to his white wife and her friends at one of its outdoor tables. W. Kamau Bell, who performs regularly in Bay Area comedy clubs, said he was shocked when the employee tapped on the window from inside the café and indicated that he should leave the area. The employee apparently thought Bell might be trying to sell something. Bell said he was dressed in a dark Oaklandish-brand hoodie at the time."

Comedian reports being victim of racism at Berkeley Cafe
Berkeleyside Newspaper
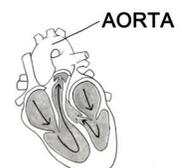
- If you became more aware of your own anti-Black racism, how will your customer service relations be affected?
- What changes might you make?

SHIFTING CULTURES

"How I longed to be whole there. Others were and so embraced and loved that co-op because they could show up as who they are in that space. I know this because some of them told me this with words as well as with the smiles, gratitude, and freedom in their eyes. Notably, "I really like working here because I can be myself" was a refrain I most heard repeated by white folks.   Were there people of color who could say the same? Maybe, but I don't recall ever hearing it.

It took over a year before I felt I could even use grammatically incorrect language in front of a small group, much less in one-on-one conversations. I felt that I had to be perfect, that I had no room to be flawed, to be thought of as Black in how I behaved. I could show up to work with an Afro, but I couldn't talk with my Brooklyn accent. I could wear a head wrap on my head but not at the same time sass back and roll my neck and eyes in anger or disgust with some of the challenges there. Visual Blackness was beloved ("You're so stylish! You're always changing your hair!") and permitted but heard Blackness was feared and dangerous."

Erasure: Politics of Identity and Leadership in Culturally White Workplaces
Jamila Medley

- In what ways does anti-Black racism shape cultural norms at your workplace?
- What changes could you make that would challenge this?

COOPERATIVE ECONOMICS

"Over the past 50 years, Black urban communities have faced economic disinvestment, deindustrialization, suburban flight, redlining and a declining tax base. Many residents of our communities are relegated to low wage, service sector work in jobs that offer few opportunities for workplace democracy and collective decision-making. A 2014 report from the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies found that cooperatives can play a crucial role in a broader campaign to fight poverty, joblessness, and income inequality. Formerly incarcerated people regularly face discrimination in employment and housing. Worker cooperatives and community land trusts would provide people with a range of job and housing opportunities while also ensuring their involvement in decision making. "

Movement for Black Lives Policy Platform

- How are co-ops well-positioned to address anti-Black racism?
- How might co-op engagement in this work strengthen the co-op movement?
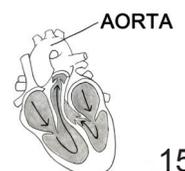
ADDRESSING ANTI-BLACK RACISM AT WORK: SCENARIOS
FACILITATOR GUIDE: HOW TO USE THIS HANDOUT

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Goal: Practice addressing and intervening in anti-Black racism when it arises in the workplace.

Recommended length of time: 40 - 70 minutes

Prep: You may want to design scenarios that feel more relevant to your workplace.

Practice engaging in addressing anti-Black racism. (10-15 minutes)
- Divide into small groups.
- Each group chooses one scenario from the list that they would like to practice.
- Groups practice for 7-10 minutes. If they run out of things to practice for their scenario, then they pick a second scenario.

Debrief. Groups share back their responses for their chosen scenarios. (20-45 minutes)

Share potential approaches for any scenarios not covered. (10 minutes)
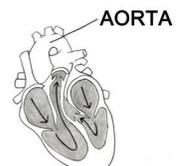
ADDRESSING ANTI-BLACK RACISM AT WORK: SCENARIOS

How to engage with these scenarios
Engage as yourself. Imagine your position, your shift, and embody your person, with all of your identities.

Questions to examine
- Do you engage in the moment?
    - If yes, what do you do and say in the moment?
- Is there follow up in the co-op, or with a co-worker?
    - If yes, what does that look like?

Scenarios

1. "Excuse me folks – is this man bothering you?" While on shift you witness a co-worker assume that a Black man in the cafe was bothering/panhandling some white customers. At the table are his wife and friends. The man has clearly been offended, but does not engage with your co-worker. Instead you see him gathering his things to leave.

2. You notice that one of your coworkers, who is Black, is being picked on for small concerns in their performance by the group in general. Many people are doing the same things, but your white coworkers are not being treated the same way.

3. You are concerned about the performance of one of your co-workers. They are Black. You know the ideal way to deal with your concern is to address it directly with them.
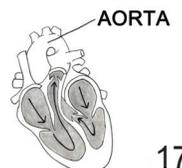
13TH DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION GUIDE
FACILITATOR GUIDE: HOW TO USE THIS HANDOUT

Goal: Better understand the roots of racism and imprisoment in the US and how those systems impact our lives today.

Recommended length of time: 2 hours to watch; 90 minutes to discuss

- It may be helpful to watch this documentary as a way of building a shared analysis prior to engaging in the other exercises in this packet.
- You can either watch the documentary as a group or ask participants to watch it on their own.
- Use the reflection questions as a discussion guide.
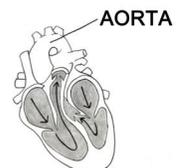
13TH DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION GUIDE

This film (available on Netflix) is very moving and in under 2 hours runs through over 150 years of racism and imprisonment. Unfortunately, it also leaves some important things out, and includes some untruths:

- Successful stories of resistance, organizing, and community power building are left out, leaving us a bleak and hopeless story of state power. For example, in California, there are now half as many women imprisoned as there were 10 years ago, due to a sustained and successful campaign.

- The prison population has actually plateaued or fallen since 2010, not increased.

- Black men no longer account for 40% of the prison population: "Although Black people remain dramatically overrepresented in prisons, the last several years have seen the number of Black men in prison drop and the number of white and Latino men—as well as women—rise." (From Dan Berger's article, cited below)

- Women of all races are left out of the conversation on imprisonment, further perpetuating a myth that imprisonment is all about men of color, and especially Black men.

- For a wonderful review of this film, with more corrections and context, you can read Dan Berger's article Mass Incarceration and its Mystification: A Review of the 13th. http://www. aaihs.org/mass-incarceration-and-its-mystification-a-review-of-the-13th/

Reflection Questions

1. Take some time to take a few deep breaths and scan your body: How are you feeling after watching the documentary?

2. What surprised you the most?

3. This film demonstrates the role media has played in shaping dominant, negative narratives of Black people. What were the first images of Black people that you were exposed to as a child? How were your understandings of Black people shaped and guided by media representations? How do those early messages still inform your thoughts, feelings, or actions today?

4. The film ends with Bryan Stevenson (Equal Justice Initiative) sharing how most of us believe that if we lived in the time of slavery, or segregation, we wouldn't have allowed those things to happen. And yet, he reminds us we are living in those times, now. How do his words impact how you reflect upon your own actions or inactions? In what ways are you complicit? In what ways does the film demonstrate that these deep acts of violence and oppression exist today? How can you become involved to intervene today?

5. How do you think the impacts of anti-Black discrimination are affecting Black folks in the workplace?

6. It is much harder to get a job with a felony conviction. What opportunities do worker co-ops present for increasing job availability and security to people who have been targeted and imprisoned?

7. In the film, we saw that people of color are disproportionately imprisoned. How might having people in your family or close community who are imprisoned impact you at work?
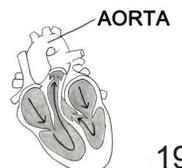
MOVEMENT FOR BLACK LIVES POLICY PLATFORM DISCUSSION & REFLECTION GUIDE
FACILITATOR GUIDE: HOW TO USE THIS HANDOUT

Goal: Become (more) familiar with the Movement for Black Lives policy platform and imagine a world where the demands are a reality.

Recommended length of time: 1 hour to read and reflect, 90 minutes to discuss

- Encourage participants to read this on their own time.
- Utilize the discussion and reflection guide to facilitate a discussion. Record key take-aways on butcher paper.
- Generate a list of opportunities to get involved in and support this work both locally and nationally; share it with participants.
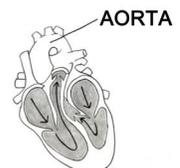
MOVEMENT FOR BLACK LIVES POLICY PLATFORM
https://policy.m4bl.org/platform/

INTRODUCTION
Black humanity and dignity requires Black political will and power. Despite constant exploitation and perpetual oppression, Black people have bravely and brilliantly been the driving force pushing the U.S. towards the ideals it articulates but has never achieved. In recent years we have taken to the streets, launched massive campaigns, and impacted elections, but our elected leaders have failed to address the legitimate demands of our Movement. We can no longer wait.

In response to the sustained and increasingly visible violence against Black communities in the U.S. and globally, a collective of more than 50 organizations representing thousands of Black people from across the country have come together with renewed energy and purpose to articulate a common vision and agenda. We are a collective that centers and is rooted in Black communities, but we recognize we have a shared struggle with all oppressed people; collective liberation will be a product of all of our work.

We believe in elevating the experiences and leadership of the most marginalized Black people, including but not limited to those who are women, queer, trans, femmes, gender nonconforming, Muslim, formerly and currently incarcerated, cash poor and working class, disabled, undocumented, and immigrant. We are intentional about amplifying the particular experience of state and gendered violence that Black queer, trans, gender nonconforming, women and intersex people face. There can be no liberation for all Black people if we do not center and fight for those who have been marginalized. It is our hope that by working together to create and amplify a shared agenda, we can continue to move towards a world in which the full humanity and dignity of all people is recognized.

While this platform is focused on domestic policies, we know that patriarchy, exploitative capitalism, militarism, and white supremacy know no borders. We stand in solidarity with our international family against the ravages of global capitalism and anti-Black racism, human-made climate change, war, and exploitation. We also stand with descendants of African people all over the world in an ongoing call and struggle for reparations for the historic and continuing harms of colonialism and slavery. We also recognize and honor the rights and struggle of our Indigenous family for land and self-determination.

We have created this platform to articulate and support the ambitions and work of Black people. We also seek to intervene in the current political climate and assert a clear vision, particularly for those who claim to be our allies, of the world we want them to help us create. We reject false solutions and believe we can achieve a complete transformation of the current systems, which place profit over people and make it impossible for many of us to breathe.

Together, we demand an end to the wars against Black people. We demand that the government repair the harms that have been done to Black communities in the form of reparations and targeted long-term investments. We also demand a defunding of the systems and institutions that criminalize and cage us. This document articulates our vision of a fundamentally different world. However, we recognize the need to include policies that address the immediate suffering of Black people. These policies, while less transformational, are necessary to address the current material conditions of our people and will better equip us to win the world we demand and deserve.
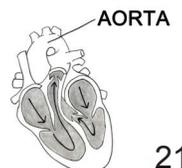
We recognize that not all of our collective needs and visions can be translated into policy, but we understand that policy change is one of many tactics necessary to move us towards the world we envision. We have come together now because we believe it is time to forge a new covenant. We are dreamers and doers and this platform is meant to articulate some of our vision. The links throughout the document provide the stepping-stones and roadmaps of how to get there. The policy briefs also elevate the brave and transformative work our people are already engaged in, and build on some of the best thinking in our history of struggle. This agenda continues the legacy of our ancestors who pushed for reparations, Black self-determination and community control; and also propels new iterations of movements such as efforts for reproductive justice, holistic healing and reconciliation, and ending violence against Black cis, queer, and trans people.

DEMANDS

End the War on Black People
We demand an end to the war against Black people. Since this country's inception there have been named and unnamed wars on our communities. We demand an end to the criminalization, incarceration, and killing of our people. This includes:
1. An immediate end to the criminalization and dehumanization of Black youth across all areas of society including, but not limited to; our nation's justice and education systems, social service agencies, and media and pop culture. This includes an end to zero-tolerance school policies and arrests of students, the removal of police from schools, and the reallocation of funds from police and punitive school discipline practices to restorative services.
2. An end to capital punishment.
3. An end to money bail, mandatory fines, fees, court surcharges and "defendant funded" court proceedings.
4. An end to the use of past criminal history to determine eligibility for housing, education, licenses, voting, loans, employment, and other services and needs.
5. An end to the war on Black immigrants including the repeal of the 1996 crime and immigration bills, an end to all deportations, immigrant detention, and Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE) raids, and mandated legal representation in immigration court.
6. An end to the war on Black trans, queer and gender nonconforming people including their addition to anti-discrimination civil rights protections to ensure they have full access to employment, health, housing and education.
7. An end to the mass surveillance of Black communities, and the end to the use of technologies that criminalize and target our communities (including IMSI catchers, drones, body cameras, and predictive policing software).
8. The demilitarization of law enforcement, including law enforcement in schools and on college campuses.
9. An immediate end to the privatization of police, prisons, jails, probation, parole, food, phone and all other criminal justice related services.
10. Until we achieve a world where cages are no longer used against our people we demand an immediate change in conditions and an end to all jails, detention centers, youth facilities and prisons as we know them. This includes the end of solitary confinement, the end of shackling of pregnant people, access to quality healthcare, and effective measures to address the needs of our youth, queer, gender nonconforming and trans families.

For more detail: https://policy.m4bl.org/end-war-on-Black-people/
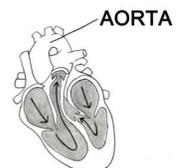
Reparations

We demand reparations for past and continuing harms. The government, responsible corporations and other institutions that have profited off of the harm they have inflicted on Black people — from colonialism to slavery through food and housing redlining, mass incarceration, and surveillance — must repair the harm done. This includes:

1. Reparations for the systemic denial of access to high quality educational opportunities in the form of full and free access for all Black people (including undocumented and currently and formerly incarcerated people) to lifetime education including: free access and open admissions to public community colleges and universities, technical education (technology, trade and agricultural), educational support programs, retroactive forgiveness of student loans, and support for lifetime learning programs.

2. Reparations for the continued divestment from, discrimination toward and exploitation of our communities in the form of a guaranteed minimum livable income for all Black people, with clearly articulated corporate regulations.

3. Reparations for the wealth extracted from our communities through environmental racism, slavery, food apartheid, housing discrimination and racialized capitalism in the form of corporate and government reparations focused on healing ongoing physical and mental trauma, and ensuring our access and control of food sources, housing and land.

4. Reparations for the cultural and educational exploitation, erasure, and extraction of our communities in the form of mandated public school curriculums that critically examine the political, economic, and social impacts of colonialism and slavery, and funding to support, build, preserve, and restore cultural assets and sacred sites to ensure the recognition and honoring of our collective struggles and triumphs.

5. Legislation at the federal and state level that requires the United States to acknowledge the lasting impacts of slavery, establish and execute a plan to address those impacts. This includes the immediate passage of H.R.40, the "Commission to Study Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act" or subsequent versions which call for reparations remedies.

For more detail: https://policy.m4bl.org/reparations/

Invest-Divest

We demand investments in the education, health and safety of Black people, instead of investments in the criminalizing, caging, and harming of Black people. We want investments in Black communities, determined by Black communities, and divestment from exploitative forces including prisons, fossil fuels, police, surveillance and exploitative corporations. This includes:

1. A reallocation of funds at the federal, state and local level from policing and incarceration (JAG, COPS, VOCA) to long-term safety strategies such as education, local restorative justice services, and employment programs.

2. The retroactive decriminalization, immediate release and record expungement of all drug related offenses and prostitution, and reparations for the devastating impact of the "war on drugs" and criminalization of prostitution, including a reinvestment of the resulting savings and revenue into restorative services, mental health services, job programs and other programs supporting those impacted by the sex and drug trade.

3. Real, meaningful, and equitable universal health care that guarantees: proximity to nearby comprehensive health centers, culturally competent services for all people, specific services for queer, gender nonconforming, and trans people, full bodily autonomy, full reproductive services, mental health services, paid parental leave, and comprehensive quality child and elder care.
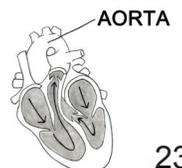
4. A constitutional right at the state and federal level to a fully-funded education which includes a clear articulation of the right to: a free education for all, special protections for queer and trans students, wrap around services, social workers, free health services (including reproductive body autonomy), a curriculum that acknowledges and addresses students' material and cultural needs, physical activity and recreation, high quality food, free daycare, and freedom from unwarranted search, seizure or arrest.
5. A divestment from industrial multinational use of fossil fuels and investment in community-based sustainable energy solutions.
6. A cut in military expenditures and a reallocation of those funds to invest in domestic infrastructure and community well-being.

For more detail: https://policy.m4bl.org/invest-divest/

Economic Justice
We demand economic justice for all and a reconstruction of the economy to ensure Black communities have collective ownership, not merely access. This includes:
1. A progressive restructuring of tax codes at the local, state, and federal levels to ensure a radical and sustainable redistribution of wealth.
2. Federal and state job programs that specifically target the most economically marginalized Black people, and compensation for those involved in the care economy. Job programs must provide a living wage and encourage support for local workers centers, unions, and Black-owned businesses which are accountable to the community.
3. A right to restored land, clean air, clean water and housing and an end to the exploitative privatization of natural resources — including land and water. We seek democratic control over how resources are preserved, used and distributed and do so while honoring and respecting the rights of our Indigenous family.
4. The right for workers to organize in public and private sectors especially in "On Demand Economy" jobs.
5. Restore the Glass-Steagall Act to break up the large banks, and call for the National Credit Union Administration and the US Department of the Treasury to change policies and practices around regulation, reporting and consolidation to allow for the continuation and creation of Black banks, small and community development credit unions, insurance companies and other financial institutions.
6. An end to the Trans-Pacific Partnership and a renegotiation of all trade agreements to prioritize the interests of workers and communities.
7. Through tax incentives, loans and other government directed resources, support the development of cooperative or social economy networks to help facilitate trade across and in Black communities globally. All aid in the form of grants, loans or contracts to help facilitate this must go to Black led or Black supported networks and organizations as defined by the communities.
8. Financial support of Black alternative institutions including policy that subsidizes and offers low-interest, interest-free or federally guaranteed low-interest loans to promote the development of cooperatives (food, residential, etc.), land trusts and culturally responsive health infrastructures that serve the collective needs of our communities.
9. Protections for workers in industries that are not appropriately regulated including domestic workers, farm workers, and tipped workers, and for workers — many of whom are Black women and incarcerated people— who have been exploited and remain unprotected. This includes the immediate passage at the Federal and state level of the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights and extension of worker protections to incarcerated people.

For more detail: https://policy.m4bl.org/economic-justice/
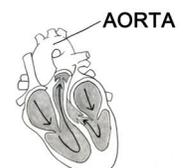
Community Control
We demand a world where those most impacted in our communities control the laws, institutions, and policies that are meant to serve us – from our schools to our local budgets, economies, police departments, and our land – while recognizing that the rights and histories of our Indigenous family must also be respected. This includes:
1. Direct democratic community control of local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies, ensuring that communities most harmed by destructive policing have the power to hire and fire officers, determine disciplinary action, control budgets and policies, and subpoena relevant agency information.
2. An end to the privatization of education and real community control by parents, students and community members of schools including democratic school boards and community control of curriculum, hiring, firing and discipline policies.
3. Participatory budgeting at the local, state and federal level.

For more detail: https://policy.m4bl.org/community-control/

Political Power
We demand independent Black political power and Black self-determination in all areas of society. We envision a remaking of the current U.S. political system in order to create a real democracy where Black people and all marginalized people can effectively exercise full political power. This includes:
1. An end to the criminalization of Black political activity including the immediate release of all political prisoners and an end to the repression of political parties.
2. Public financing of elections and the end of money controlling politics through ending super PACs and unchecked corporate donations.
3. Election protection, electoral expansion and the right to vote for all people including: full access, guarantees, and protections of the right to vote for all people through universal voter registration, automatic voter registration, pre-registration for 16-year-olds, same day voter registration, voting day holidays, Online Voter Registration (OVR), enfranchisement of formerly and presently incarcerated people, local and state resident voting for undocumented people, and a ban on any disenfranchisement laws.
4. Full access to technology including net neutrality and universal access to the internet without discrimination and full representation for all.
5. Protection and increased funding for Black institutions including Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU's), Black media and cultural, political and social formations.

For more detail: https://policy.m4bl.org/political-power/
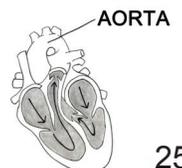
M4BL POLICY PLATFORM DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION GUIDE

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Take a moment to notice what is happening in your body, your heart, and your mind after reading through the policy platform. Notice the sensations in your body, the pace of your heartbeat, and the types of thoughts that are arising after reading the platform.

When we are confronted with transformative visions of society, our first response is frequently to consider all of the things that are wrong, inaccurate, and impossible about those visions. Many of us who have been socialized or acculturated in American society lack awareness of the fundamental ideologies that impact our ability to envision different possibilities, much less build movements rooted in those alternative visions.

Reflect: after reading this, what feels possible to me and for my community, and what feels impossible? Having identified what feels impossible, dig a little deeper and ask yourself why it feels impossible. Write down a few of those reasons.

Then return to your list of what feels possible, and write down a few of the reasons why some demands and policies feel possible.

Look at these two lists side by side, and take time to explore the relationship between the possible and the impossible.

GROUP DISCUSSION

- Reading through the policy platform, were you able to differentiate between those policies that are "transformational," i.e. those policies that are rooted in a vision of a fundamentally different world, and those which are "reforming," i.e. those policies which address the immediate suffering of Black people?
  - Using the Demands as headers, make a list of a few transformational policies and a few reforming policies.
  - What makes the policies different?
  - In what ways are they connected?
  - How are those which are reforming building blocks towards those which are transformational?

- Much social change work is about navigating the tension between broad cultural change and institutional change. Cultural change is change that is rooted in transforming the stories we tell and the beliefs we hold that enable racist and white supremacist ideologies to emerge through individuals and institutions. Institutional change is rooted in reforming policies or developing new policies that redress past harm or seek to prevent it from happening again, and require individuals to make different choices or change their behaviors.
  - What are the broad cultural changes that the policy platform asks for?
  - What new stories and new beliefs need to be integrated in order for policy and institutional change to be effective?
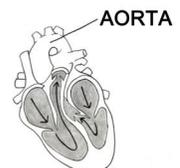
- Many aspects of the policy platform call for an end to policing and the criminal justice system as we know it. At the end of the 1960s, when it was no longer legal to explicitly segregate society based on race and restrict the lives of Black people, much of how white supremacy functions on a systemic level became encoded into our criminal justice system. In order to uproot white supremacy, we must fundamentally change the way we understand and engage in community safety and individual accountability.
    - Given this reality, what would a world without police look like?
    - What would a world without criminalization of Black people look like?

- What barriers exist - financially, culturally, electorally, and politically - to moving these demands at local, state, and national levels? What organizing strategies are you aware of that are effective in overcoming these barriers?

- In what ways is the policy platform grounded in values that many Americans would claim as "American" values? in what ways is the policy platform grounded in other values, and what are those values? How do they differ from "American values"?
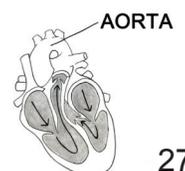
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