

Session 4: Transformative Network for Healing Racism

by

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The challenges of OSP IHM being a transformative network for healing the hurts of racism.

We opened our exploration with a theological view of of the one history as God's history, which should give us the opportunity to ask how we see the American racial project within the history of salvation. SLIDE

We've viewed this history not only through an individual lens, but also through a systemic or institutional one.

When viewing the racial projects of US history, an institutional lens asks us to see actors making choices situated in broader systems that both collectivize their actions and pass the effects along beyond themselves. The many mechanisms through which racial injustice was manufactured and disseminated throughout US history include legislation that named citizens as ‘Free White Persons’ and created structures in which benefits were distributed or withheld. The institutional legacies of wealth-building on stolen land and stolen labor rooted in systems which profited White people, and the institutions of healthcare and education key in the projects of human flourishing. Knowledge-production and media-dissemination of ideas both systems situated within institutions that carried out this work of disseminating and reflecting the wider racial project. Not least among these institutions of our concern has been the ways in which Catholic and Christian theological ideas granted symbolic capital to these projects of White priority within institutions. As Joseph Barndt reflects in his *Becoming an Anti-Racist Church*, every institution in the US was created with the interests of White citizens in view.

SLIDE

Barndt’s assessment is compelling, but it also overlooks the creative ways that people of color in this country created their own institutions, wresting sites of power from dominant forms of White control. The self-determination of sovereign indigenous nations, Black-owned business and schools for children of color, and the passing along of generational wisdom all resources for resisting what sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant describe as the ‘hegemonic racial project’ of White dominance.

Being situated within institutions today, we might experience this history as deflating, or we might experience this history as inspiring, but we want to know this history for at least two reasons. One is to recognize the inheritance that is conveyed through these institutions and the second is recognize actors situated within their racial projects making choices, so that we might feel the weight of that inheritance and make our own choices in relation to the racial projects of today. Being situated within institutions gives us the opportunity to be active and transformative members of those institutions shifting resources in the direction of greater racial justice. Being situated within a *network* of institutions gives us the opportunity to do something together that we could not do alone.

SLIDE In their *Undoing Racism* workshops, the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond have been training anti-racism agents for over fifty years. The principles of their work are outlined on their website and include some of the features we have explored in our series. They describe "History as a tool [where] understanding the lessons of history allows us to create a more humane future." As we've seen, there is much more to learn about our histories. People's Institute insists that we analyze power explaining "as a society, we often believe that individuals and/or their communities are solely responsible for their conditions. Through the analysis of institutional power, we can identify and unpack the systems external to the community that create the internal realities many people experience daily." Here too we've only begun this work recognizing how racialized legislation created systems of wealth building the directly impact the experience of poor communities today. The principles of understanding history and analyzing power through an institutional lens are just two elements of the

comprehensive training they offer to communities and individuals who want to develop the leadership skills to act toward anti-racist ends. Two additional principles will guide our session here with the concept of “gatekeeping” and the importance of networking.

As the People’s Institute explains, “persons who work in institutions often function as gatekeepers to ensure that the institution perpetuates itself. The gatekeeper becomes an agent of institutional transformation by operating with anti-racist values and networking with those who share those values and maintain accountability in the community.” Because we have seen that racism is embedded in the practices of institutions, gatekeepers are essential in their roles of identifying and analyzing manifestations of racism and taking steps to change those practices.

In the histories of the OSP and IHM we’ve seen Mother Mary Lange and Theresa Maxis navigate the systems of their own day and leverage the power of institutions to serve the most vulnerable and those in need. Through the institution of the congregations they have founded, generations of women religious have participated in the systems of our nation in a collective, congregational way.

SLIDE OF SYSTEMS If we can adopt a systemic and institutional lens, we can see the many locations in which racism or anti-racism is manufactured and mobilized – in knowledge systems of curriculum, in media, in legislation, the messaging of spiritual practices and congregational motivations, the city planning, and access to education, clean water, healthcare, representation and wealth-building. An institutional study of history can identify the places in our own institutional histories where our ancestors were part of racial projects bequeathed to us today. But an institutional perspective might also allow us to identify where we are situated as gatekeepers to enact change. Consider this

map of systems and institutions: Where are you situated institutionally? What role does this institution play in our era's racial project?

Like our foundresses, we might ask ourselves the questions of how we might leverage our locations within institutions to do God's work in the world. In leveraging our resources, we might keep ourselves guided by the vision of Catholic Social Teaching expressed in *Gaudium et Spes*. "There must be made available to all [persons] everything necessary for leading a life truly human, such as food, clothing, and shelter; the right to choose a state of life freely and to found a family; the right to education, to employment, to a good reputation, to respect, to appropriate information, to activity in accord with the upright norm of one's conscience, to protection of privacy, and to rightful freedom in matters religious too." The Sediementation of Racial Inequality reflected in the racial wealth gap of our nation demonstrates that the pursuit of leading a life truly human is often hindered by access to wealth and experienced differentially among the human family in our nation.

Considering the landscape of systems and institutions the project of looking from out of history and into the future will rest on our asking a new set of questions. As you locate yourself, your family history, your congregational history and your institutional history within this map, you might ask yourself:

Who had the power to create these systems?

Where have we seen racism built into these systems?

ADVANCE SLIDES TO SHOW FOUNDRESSES

ADVANCE SLIDES TO SHOW LOGOS

I'd invite you at this point to find a piece of paper and something to write with, so that the exercise of institutional examination might take some concrete form in answering the next series of questions...

GIVE TIME TO WRITE ANSWERS

- How does your location within institutions provide a vantage point for **recognizing** institutionalized racism?
 - Whose concerns are at its center?
 - Who holds power?
 - Who benefits from the work of the institution?
 - Who remains underserved in relation to the work of the institution, within our broader society?
 - Who are recognized as active agents within the institution?

- How does your location within institutions provide a vantage point for **transforming** institutionalized racism?
 - How can your institution center the concerns of people of color in relation to the wider realities of structural racism?
 - How can you share power across racial lines?
 - In what ways can you ensure that people of color benefit from the work of the institution?
 - How does the work of anti-racism within the institution give a vantage point for broader change within society?
 - Where can you leverage the capital of your institution toward change?

- What are the resources held by your institution?

- We've seen some of these resources in our exploration of history in the ways they helped to create racial projects, and we might think about mobilizing them in our own racial project.
 - Property – in what ways can property and a built environment be leveraged to host the work of anti-racism, organizing, networking – like we saw in the AME image from 1845.
 - Capital – in what ways can monetary resources be dedicated to anti-racism projects?
 - Symbolic Capital – what types of symbolic capital does being members of congregations of women religious afford you that others do not have access to?
 - Spiritual Capital – what deep grounding in spiritual practices might be deep wells for anti-racism practices.
 - People power – which relationships can you mobilize as leaders and members of the great resource of people power.
 - Relationships
 - Knowledge – where are you located as purveyors of knowledge that might expand our understanding of history and develop further analyses; where are you located as conveyors of knowledge to the next generation of anti-racists.
 - Access to Media/Messaging – what access do you have messaging that might announce anti-racism as a gospel-value, developing knowledge and mobilizing the people-power of faith-institutions

- Citizenship/Representation/Legislation – how does fundamental access as citizens with representation in the law-making bodies of our nation provide a location to do anti-racism work.
- How might these resources be leveraged for the work of anti-racism?

As Christians we believe that the Creative power of the universe courses through all creation at every moment enlivening and sustaining us. This reality that we have named God and who has been revealed to us in the person of Jesus *cares* about history. In the words of Mother Mary Lange: Our sole wish is to do the will of God.

Guided by the witness of Theresa Maxis we embody our moment in this history with “Prayerfulness, simplicity, forgetfulness of self, humility, and a deep love and respect for each individual soul.”¹ As we orient ourselves to the future, we are not only deeply rooted in our congregational history, but we are rooted in the one history that is God’s history and salvation history. What will we do in our next chapter to help bring into being the next chapter of God’s singular history?

¹ <https://ihmimmaculata.org/about-us/our-foundation/>