

Unpacking White Saviorism in Service



AmeriCorps

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Community Agreements

1. Stay engaged: Staying engaged means “remaining morally, emotionally, intellectually, and socially involved in the dialogue” (p. 59)
2. Experience discomfort: This norm acknowledges that discomfort is inevitable, especially, in dialogue about race, and that participants make a commitment to bring issues into the open. It is not talking about these issues that create divisiveness. The divisiveness already exists in the society and in our schools. It is through dialogue, even when uncomfortable, the healing and change begin.
3. Speak your truth: This means being open about thoughts and feelings and not just saying what you think others want to hear.
4. Expect and accept non-closure: This agreement asks participants to “hang out in uncertainty” and not rush to quick solutions, especially in relation to racial understanding, which requires ongoing dialogue (pp. 58-65).

Community Agreements Cont...

- ▶ Step Up, Step Back
- ▶ Intent vs. Impact
- ▶ Take Accountability for Your Words
- ▶ This is A LOT – especially if this is new to you!
- ▶ Anything else you'd like to add?

AN INVITATION TO BRAVE SPACE



Together we will create *brave space*.
Because there is no such thing as a “safe space” —
We exist in the real world.
We all carry scars and we have all caused wounds.
In this space
We seek to turn down the volume of the outside world,
We amplify voices that fight to be heard elsewhere,
We call each other to more truth and love.
We have the right to start somewhere and continue to grow.
We have the responsibility to examine what we think we know.
We will not be perfect.
This space will not be perfect.
It will not always be what we wish it to be.
But
It will be *our brave space together*,
and
We will work on it side by side.

by Micky ScottBey Jones

www.thepeoplesupper.org

Acknowledgements
for our BIPOC (Black,
Indigenous, People
of Color) AmeriCorps
Program Staff:

- ▶ We recognize these conversations are tough and might be triggering - take a break if you need!
- ▶ We are not expecting you to teach or educate your white peers.
- ▶ We appreciate you being in this space with us as we unpack the ways in which white saviorism negatively impacts our organizations and AmeriCorps programs.

A CALL TO ACTION

- Take out a piece of paper and number it 1-5
 - Anytime you feel the following, write it on your list to revisit:
 - When you are feeling "flushed" from something we've said (maybe you really love a movie we have mentioned that perpetuates a white saviorism narrative)
 - Feel yourself disengaging
 - Want to learn more about something

Why are we talking about this?

White people hold power and privilege over BIPOC. Systemic racism has led to BIPOC having less access to wealth, opportunities, etc.

Due to the wealth/access gap, often times white folks are hired into program staff/service roles because they are able to live on the stipend/low salaries.

There is then often lack of representation of BIPOC in AmeriCorps Programs.

These white members/program staff are often disconnected from the communities they are serving.

In order to obtain operational funding, organizations will often tokenize and exploit the story of the community, often centering the narrative around the white led organization who is supporting the community.

All of these actions harm BIPOC AmeriCorps members, staff and BIPOC communities we are serving.

Reflect on your identity and your experiences in AmeriCorps

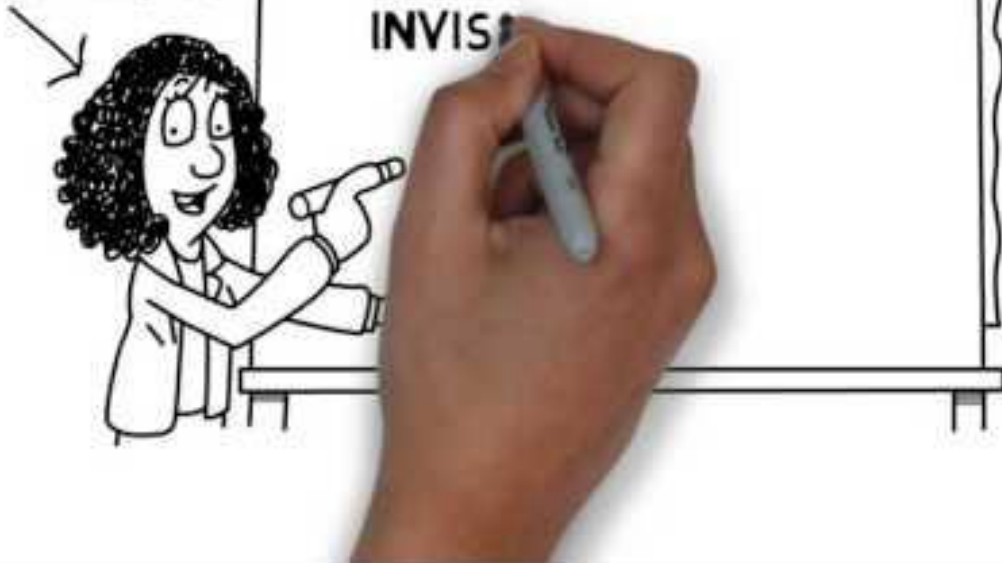
- ▶ What is your race?
- ▶ How is your race perceived by the world? (i.e. latinx but white “passing”)
- ▶ What is your socio-economic status?
- ▶ What has your access to opportunity and a quality education been?
- ▶ Will these identities and life experiences be different or similar to the majority of members that your program supports? What about the communities you serve?

When you show up in your role at your organization, you show up with these parts of who you are in tow. You show up with YOUR OWN world view, life experiences and biases towards people who are different from you – whether you want to admit that or not.

Shared Language and Definitions

- ▶ White Privilege
 - ▶ is **not** the assumption that everything a white person has accomplished is unearned. Instead, white privilege should be viewed as a built-in advantage, for simply being white.

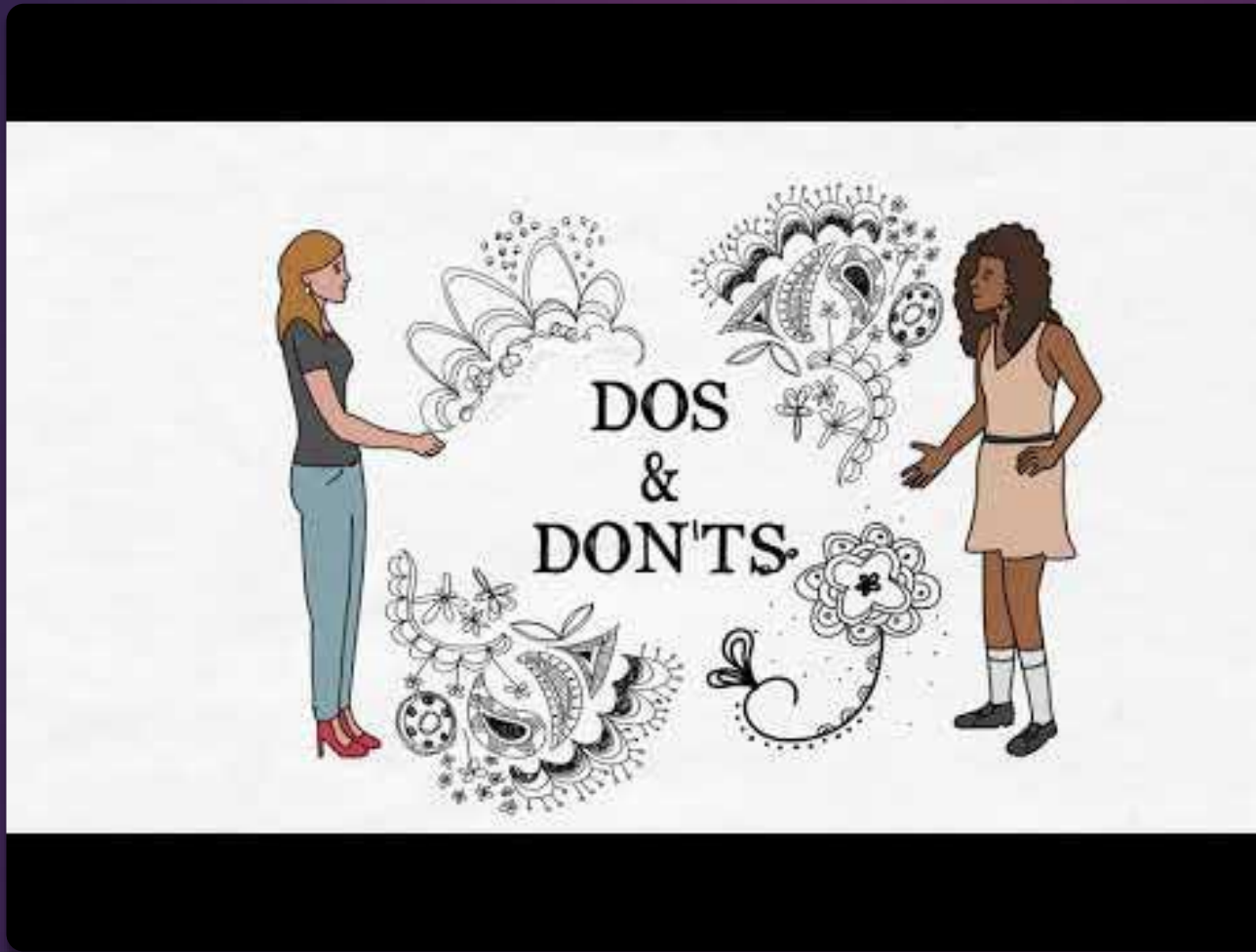
NOT THE REAL
PEGGY MCINTOSH



White Privilege 101

Shared Language and Definitions

- ▶ White Fragility
 - ▶ term has been popularized by Robin DiAngelo's book "White Fragility". This term to feelings of discomfort or defensiveness a white person experiences when they witness discussions around racial inequality and injustice.



White Fragility 101



Intention vs. Impact

White folks, think of your
Whiteness as an elephant.

Whiteness takes up a lot of space,
even though it feels normal to us.

When we take a step, we may not
realize how big our footprint is.

We can unknowingly harm
everything in our path.

It's time to start looking at where
we put our feet down,
rather than excusing ourselves
for just walking.

@antiracismeveryday

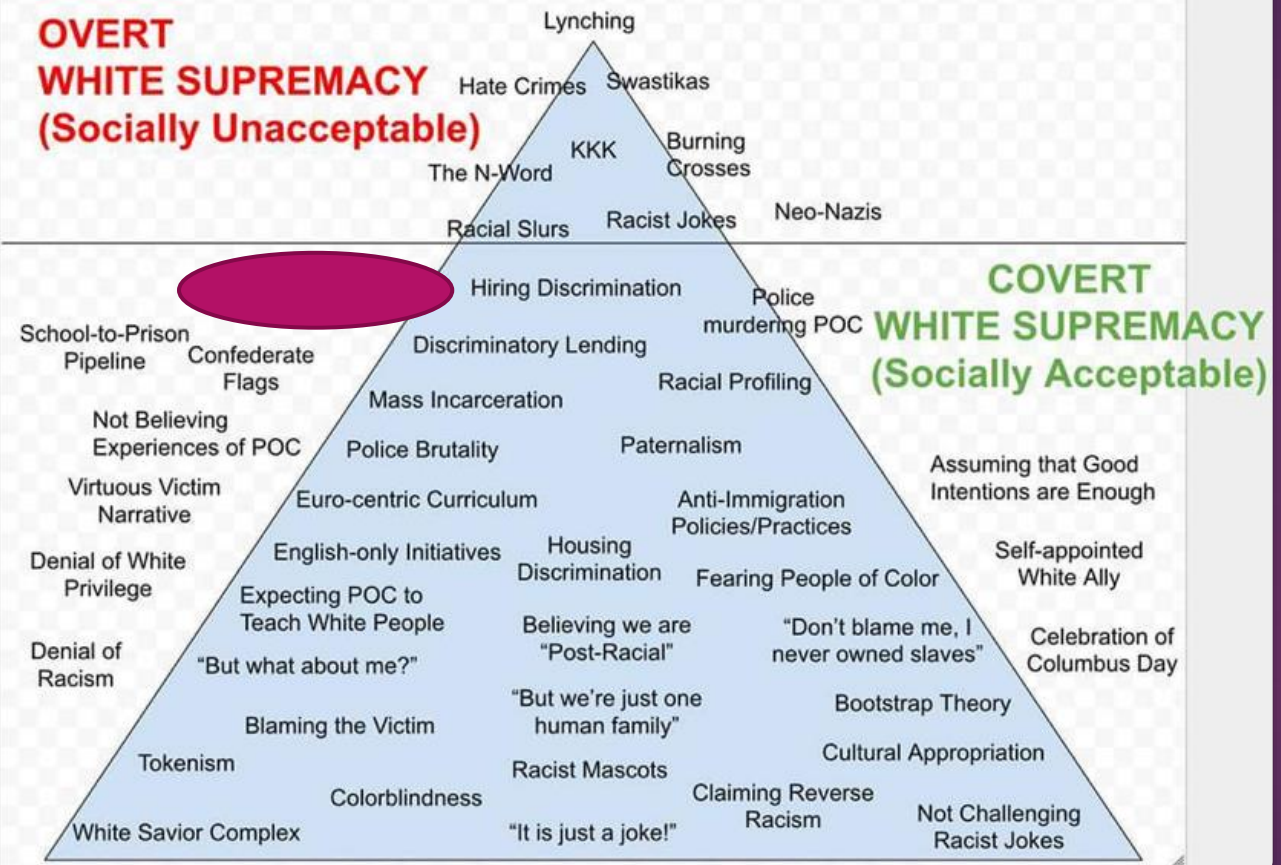
Shared Language and Definitions

- ▶ White Supremacy
 - ▶ Often thought of as individuals who are outwardly racist in their behaviors, beliefs, etc. While these individuals are undoubtedly racist, white supremacy is much larger. White supremacy captures the all-encompassing centrality and assumed superiority of people defined and perceived as white.



THE LONGER YOU SWIM
IN A CULTURE, THE MORE
INVISIBLE IT BECOMES

**OVERT
WHITE SUPREMACY
(Socially Unacceptable)**



White Supremacy 101

White Supremacy Culture



Exploring Cultural Values & Habits

Cultural competence is having the self-awareness to make choices about when to reach for which cultural tool. Often in the US we are habitualized around left column attitudes and behaviors at the expense of those in the right column, those most needed to understand and navigate complex relationships across difference to build thriving, cohesive communities.

Dominant white cultural values and habits can be internalized by people of all racial and ethnic identities. We all need to know, use, and – when possible, subvert – these norms to navigate and survive everyday life in US dominant culture.

Dominant (White) Cultural Values & Habits	Transformational Cultural Values & Habits
Perfectionism	Learning from mistakes
Sense of urgency, Fix now	Faster not always better, Understand
Defensiveness, Denial	Owning Impact, Acknowledgement
Quantity	Quality
Worship of the written word	Value placed on transmitting info orally, visually
Only one right way, one right perspective	Multiple approaches, multiple perspectives
Paternalism	Shared leadership and decision-making
Objectivity, prefer absolutes	Subjectivity, Can tolerate ambiguity
Comfort is my right	Discomfort leads to growth
Either/or	Both/and
Hoarding/withholding (empathy, power, \$, knowledge)	Generosity (empathy, power, \$, knowledge)
Conflict Avoidance	Conflict navigation & resolution skills
Individualism, Self-sufficiency	Interdependence, Community
Progress = bigger, more	Progress = process, sustainability
Transactional	Relational
Hierarchical, authoritative	Collaborative, negotiation
Dominated space	Shared space
Eurocentric, American Exceptionalism	Global Community, Global Citizenship
Formal education is best knowledge	Lived experience is essential knowledge
Emotional Restraint	Emotional honesty

What do you normally think of when you hear “cultural competence”?

What is White Saviorism?



**THE WHITE SAVIOR COMPLEX
CONVINCES YOU
THAT YOU MUST BE THE
VOICE FOR THE "VOICELESS".
RESPONSIBLE PARTNERSHIP
REQUIRES THAT YOU
PASS THE MIC TO THE UNHEARD.
IT MEANS REALIZING
THAT WE ARE NOT VOICELESS,
YOU'VE JUST BEEN
TALKING OVER US
FOR FAR TOO LONG.**

- ▶ “A white person who provides help or ‘aid’ to non-white people in a self-serving manner while simultaneously dehumanizing those they set out to ‘help’”.
- ▶ White saviorism or “white savior complex”, has deep roots in colonialism when native populations being colonized all around the world were assumed to be in need of “saving” by white European Christian missionaries.
- ▶ Often times, the white savior complex is something that the individual is not consciously aware of, which is the root of the issue.

White Saviorism can look like...

- ▶ The Classic Hollywood Trope – do you recognize these movies?
- ▶ Assuming you know best, when you come from a completely different community
- ▶ Using people of color as “props” in social media posts
- ▶ Desiring an emotional experience to feel validated
- ▶ Feeling guilty for having more privilege
- ▶ Seeing something done differently in a culture and wanting to “fix it” to make it more like our own culture
- ▶ “They are happy with so little”
- ▶ Poverty or Trauma “Porn”



It can also look like...

- ▶ Feeling the urge to step in and speak on behalf of BIPOC's needs rather than leaving them with the agency to speak for themselves
- ▶ The centering of white narratives on BIPOC liberation, such as the belief that nonwhite Muslim women who freely choose to wear the hijab need to be freed from their so-called oppression by ditching the hijab and embracing Western White Feminism
- ▶ The desire to be the hero of a story – elevate BIPOC voices and their work instead!

Voluntourism

- ▶ PeaceCorps is an international example but we know this happens domestically as well
- ▶ Volunteers are (sometimes) inexperienced
- ▶ Quick transitions in and out of the role (i.e. year long terms of service)
- ▶ How many of your members are local vs. from outside the community you are serving?




Understanding the Layers of Complexity



Again...why are we talking about this?


- ▶ The overwhelming number of educators in schools where the majority of students are students of color are white, come from different communities and are of different socioeconomic classes. This creates an inherent power imbalance.
- ▶ In AmeriCorps, there is often little socioeconomic diversity due to the low living stipend. And unfortunately, due to systemic racism – a disproportionate amount of BIPOC individuals are of a lower socio-economic status as well which makes it harder to have a program that reflects the students we serve.





If you're coming into a place to
save somebody then you've
already lost because young
people don't need saving.

-KENYA DOWNS

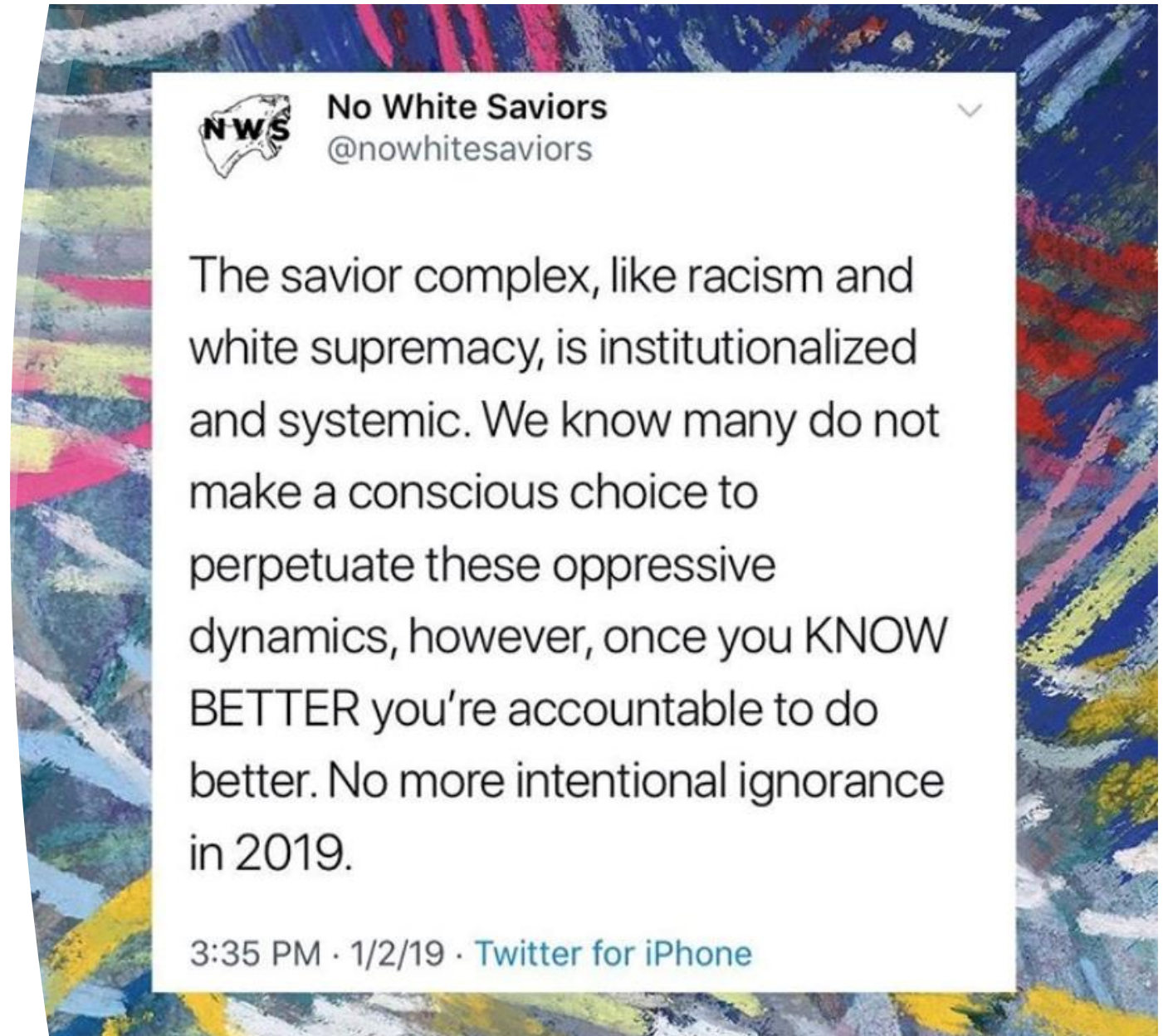


“Different cultures do not exist for your consumption, someone else’s way of living is not there for you to ‘experience’”.

@NOWHITESAVIORS

So, what now?

- ▶ Remember the systemic and institutionalized nature of the white savior complex – while we have responsibilities to unlearn our biases as individuals, this is a systemic issue.
- ▶ Have humility!
- ▶ You are working “with” communities, not “for” them.
- ▶ Never stop holding yourself accountable for the work that you still have left to do – we live in a world that has maintained the white savior narrative for a long time, it’s a process to unlearn and unpack.
- ▶ THIS IS FRAMEWORK – you should carry this with you in all your interactions in your AmeriCorps programs and within your communities more broadly.



Anti-Racism Assessment Tool for Organizations & AmeriCorps Programs

Member/Staff Recruitment

- How are you intentionally recruiting members/staff that reflect the community you serve? Are you recruiting members/staff that are from the community you serve?
- How is your organization doing its best to provide a living wage to members/staff in order to recruit folks with less socio-economic privilege?
- How do your interview questions communicate to applicants that your organization values anti-racism?
- How do your interview questions allow for applicants to describe their commitment to anti-racism?
- What is your process for checking your implicit biases that inevitably will come up during an interview? What conversations or systems are in place to do this?

Resources:

- ▶ @nowwhitesaviors
- ▶ @sylviaaduckworth
- ▶ “Me and White Supremacy” by Lalya Saad
- ▶ “Social Service or Social Change? Who Benefits from your Work?” by Paul Kivel
- ▶ “The Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture” from Dismantling Racism: A Workbook for Social Change Groups, by Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun

Reflect – the 4 A's



- ▶ Appreciation
- ▶ Apology
- ▶ Ask
- ▶ Aha

Additional Resources?

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Questions?