



## Structural Injustice: Coping with Race-Related Trauma and Turning to Your Roots for a Solution

*“Misery won’t touch you gentle. It always leaves its thumbprints on you; sometimes it leaves them for others to see, sometimes for nobody but you to know of.”-Edwidge Danticat (The Farming of Bones)*

The recent police violence, intercommunal aggression, and innumerable loss of Black lives continue to cast light on systemic oppression and lack of justice for Black and other minority identified individuals. The pain, anguish, and rage you see on social media and news outlets may bring up past memories of racism, micro aggressions, and trauma related to both. The onslaught of images of violence, particularly amidst a pandemic, can bring up feelings of helplessness, lack of control, uncertainty, fear, anger, worry for family and community members, and disappointment and frustration with the political and legal system.

While past life experiences may be more activated than ever, some of us are marinating in narratives that lead us to continue extending our voices for civil rights. Combating the present while past trauma is amplified can lead us in many directions. Some of us engage in advocacy, others distance and isolate in an attempt to shield ourselves. As you explore and grow in your understanding of your story as a Black person or a person of color, please know **that every feeling is valid**. Anger. Pain. Exhaustion. Trepidation. Malaise. Disconnection. Each one of these adjectives speak to the wounds (physical and emotional) that may currently be festering. Unfortunately, years or a life time of being torn down because of your skin tone and culture, cannot be healed quickly.

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 2 Privilege and Allyship
- 3 Responding to Personal and Microaggressive Racism
- 4 Working to Dismantle Systemic Racism
- 5 Upcoming Events
- 6 Resource Guide

The body remembers and holds its trauma, and when our trauma is activated, it is shared and experienced by our mind, body and soul. This can result in feeling overwhelmed, frustrated, fearful, and worried. In our body, we may experience headaches, increased heart rate, difficulty breathing, and unexplained aches and pains. These experiences may be activated by our own, vicarious, as well as generational and historical pain. When the world spends substantial time telling you that you are not enough by minimizing your identities and talents, imposing dominant values around communication and language on you, putting you in a closed box, and denying your opportunities, it is easy to believe that message. Fighting oppressive messages is tiresome and can feel defeating.

What systemic oppression chooses not to notice is your resiliency, namely, your capacity to recover and cope with recurrent pain, barriers, lack of resources, and unequal opportunities. *You are strong and resilient because despite holding worry about financial survival and psychological and physical safety of you and your loved ones, you continue to perform your daily life tasks. Resiliency is an unrecognized muscle that gets stronger and stronger with use.* Your muscle is more toned than the unjust system would like you to believe. Before you continue reading ways of coping with race related pain, we want to refer you back to your powerful muscle (resiliency).

A loud, oppressive system can make it hard for us to hear and notice our own gifts and strengths. Residing in this critical system can make it hard to practice self-compassion. **As you wade through this unjust system, consider being gentle and kind to yourself.** This judgmental system may have taught you to judge yourself. **Consider fighting those oppressive voices by using kind words and understanding with yourself, instead.**

Oppressive systems attempt to obliterate our cultural roots and encourage focus on dominant culture values and practices. Though living in the time of the pandemic reduces options for cultural practices related to coping, we encourage you to **look within your culture for self-care through prayers, meditation, music, dance, art, poetry, and literature. Consider reaching out to your community. Surround yourself with voices that believe in you and avoid those that inflict pain through their ignorance.**

*Continued on page 2*

It is not your responsibility to educate and fix. You also do not need to keep diving into media outlets if it deepens your anguish. **Consider, where you can, setting boundaries with people and media.**

Along with leaning into your resiliency and towards your cultural roots, **consider trusting your pain and human need for support.** Sometimes when pain is layered and continuous, turning to someone for support and guidance to feel more empowered and in control of your journey can be helpful. Although you have the strong muscle of resilience and adequate internal resources, the Counseling Center staff remain a resource to support you in your journey.

---

## Privilege and Allyship

*“Discomfort is always a necessary part of enlightenment.” - Pearl Cleage*

The words “privilege” and “white privilege” have been central in discourse related to systemic oppression and racial injustice. When we are called to reflect on privilege or white privilege in particular, it is helpful to remember that it is not an indictment of our personhood, but rather, a commentary on the fact that our society is organized in such a way where certain groups or identities are given access to advantages beyond what’s available to others. If you--based on your race, sexual orientation, ability status, etc. – belong in one of those groups, you benefit simply by belonging to that group. A major benefit of privilege is that it’s invisible for the holder; you rarely reflect on its benefits while others who don’t have access to it painfully and clearly see it for what it is. Like Peggy Macintosh [explained](#), those with racial privilege benefit by not having to consider such things as: whether we will be followed in a store, whether our local beauty store will have products that are unique to our skin/hair, or whether we can open up a magazine and have faces reflected back to us that look like ours. More recent events in our country highlight that those of us with white privilege likely don’t have to worry about being killed while out for jog, sleeping in our beds at night, or confronting police. It gets complicated from here –all of us hold multiple identities, some of which hold privilege and some are marginalized. The [intersection of these identities](#) is important to be aware of and consider while growing in our awareness of how to be better agents of change.

### Doing the Work – Increasing Awareness of Privilege

If we commit to change, we must face the uncomfortable truth of how privilege and systemic injustice perpetuates the disadvantages and real threats to livelihood Black people and other

marginalized folks endure. Confronting privilege that comes with whiteness (and/or other social identities that hold privileged status such as being straight, able-bodied, Christian, cisgender, etc.) starts with accepting that you may benefit from privilege given to you based on social identities you occupy, and getting curious about the ways you may benefit from these “invisible” benefits. A good place to start is to take stock of all the narratives you are hearing currently about the experience of Black people in America as their voices rise to decry systemic racism – do these narratives make you feel uncomfortable? Are you pulled to offer counter points or advice? Do you decry racist behavior while maintaining a stance of neutrality (e.g., “I’m not racist”)? Do you have the ability to disengage completely and not focus on the topic at all? All these responses may point to the possibility that your lived experience is not only different from others but allows you to go on in life in such a way that’s not possible for Black or brown people.

Here are a few resources to help you start “doing the work” of learning and challenging privilege:

- Take the [Implicit Association Test](#) – this well-researched online tool measures associations between concepts (Black people, for example) and judgments (good/bad). It’s an accessible exercise to help you begin to learn about stereotypes or biases that go largely unnoticed. Though it may be uncomfortable to acknowledge that you have biases, know that everyone carries them and that it is our work to identify and challenge them.
- Racism scholars tell us that since we are embedded in a racist system, we all harbor racist beliefs: review the [racism scale](#) to begin to learn about the spectrum that this can take and consider where you may fall.
- Consider some of the writing [prompts](#) listed on this page to help you examine early core beliefs developed about race.

### How to Be an Ally

Social activist and author Bell Hooks wrote: “privilege is not in and of itself bad; what matters is what we do with privilege. We have to share our resources and take direction about how to use our privilege in ways that empower those who lack it.”

**Educate yourself:** As you commit to confronting privilege and ways you may benefit from it, invest in learning about systemic racism, White supremacy, and how the system continues to operate today. This work is hard, at times painful, but so important. Seek out authors representing diverse identities. While it is paramount to listen to what they have to say, don’t ask your Black and brown friends or family members to teach you or find you resources.

*Continued on page 3*

**Be active:** Allies are called to stand up and speak up, even when scared or anxious, because their privilege often shields them from worse repercussions that a marginalized person would otherwise face. Invite diverse voices to conversations you are a part of. Support Black authors, activists, and poets by consuming and sharing their work. Join causes that align with social justice values.

**Stay humble:** Actively working towards an anti-racist stance is an ongoing process, one in which we fumble, make mistakes, and say the wrong things. Remember this is a journey, and one in which we have opportunity to learn from mistakes. Commit to listening to feedback if something you say/do misses the mark; accept, apologize and repair; give yourself grace as you continue to learn and integrate things you learn, and remember that while you may feel pain/discomfort in these encounters, embracing the discomfort and engaging in these conversations is doing the work.

### **Difficult Conversations about Privilege, Racial Injustice and Allyship**

Conversations about privilege and racial injustice are difficult in part because they activate our defenses. These defenses can range from outward attack to avoidance (see examples outlined in [here](#) and [here](#)). In the spirit of humbly growing into stronger allies, consider these tips when offered reactions or feedback from others:

**Take a breath:** If you have been given difficult feedback, taking a few moments to center yourself and choose intentional language goes a long way to minimize common defenses and allows you to speak authentically.

**Listen:** Listening is a difficult skill; most of us listen to someone while simultaneously formulating a response in our head. Listen with an effort to understand the emotional experience of the person across from you, striving to remember that even if what they're telling you isn't familiar, it doesn't mean it's not true.

**Acknowledge:** If you've made a misstep, acknowledge how this made the person feel and the impact it created (avoid starting the acknowledgement with "I didn't INTEND"), and commit to doing better.

**Process:** It's valid and normal for allies (particularly white allies) to confront complicated feelings when addressing racial injustice, including feelings of guilt, discomfort, or anxiety. These feelings should be processed and addressed, and it's more productive when done privately or with other individuals who wouldn't be burdened by holding your emotions while trying to tend to their pain at the same time. ❖

## **Responding to Personal and Microaggressive Racism**

*"Not everything that is faced can be changed; but nothing can be changed until it is faced." -James Baldwin (As Much Truth As One Can Bear, New York Times)*

If you witness someone say or do something racist, you have a choice to make about how to respond. That choice is likely to be shaped by factors such as your social identity (are you a white ally calling out racism or a person of color experiencing it?), as well as your relationship to the person/institution committing the racist act (is this a family member whose relationship is important to preserve), and the scope of the act (racial microaggression vs witnessing police brutality on your street).

Racial microaggressions are defined by Derald Wing Sue and colleagues as "everyday slights, insults, putdowns, invalidations, and offensive behaviors that people of color experience in daily interactions with generally well-intentioned White Americans who may be unaware that they have engaged in racially demeaning ways toward target groups" (click [here](#) for some examples). Some general things to keep in mind while responding to racism on this more personal level include:

**Consider your privilege.** White people addressing racism and racist microaggressions are less likely to experience the kind of negative consequences black or people of color would. Speak up, say anything – it will have more impact than silence. It can be as simple as "that doesn't sit well with me, can you clarify what you mean?"

**Consider the audience:** if you are addressing a microaggression committed by a close friend or family member whom you respect, consider that the relationship could weather – and be strengthened by – feedback about concerns you experience. Ask for clarification and communicate back how their words sound. "Your comment about the protests conveys a lack of empathy for people who are hurting, which isn't usually like you– is that what you mean to say?"

**Communicating with words:** Try to use "I" or "me" statements to share how microaggressive comments or actions make you feel. One helpful emotion to use is empathy; "If I were in \_\_\_'s shoes, I might feel \_\_\_ about what you've just said." If you are feeling angry, remember that it is justified and can be used in a persuasive way to help others see their impact. [Here are some concrete examples.](#)

*Continued on page 4*

**Communicating with more than words:** If you don't know what to say, or can't say something because lack of safety/power, are you in a position to communicate in other ways? Consider how your posture and facial expressions can send a message; you could also say something like, "It makes me uncomfortable to hear this from you, I'm going to excuse myself." See our next section on how you can communicate on a more systemic level, too.

**Set boundaries:** Sometimes, others just won't listen; they might become so defensive that they continue to invalidate, ignore, or dismiss the concerns you share. In these cases, setting a boundary can be best to protect yourself and to communicate disapproval. This may be easier said than done, especially for our Black and brown community members, given the pervasiveness of racist messages and acts. This boundary will also likely look different based on context and relationship: for a white person, a boundary may be to not continue to engage with people/groups that repeatedly dismiss concerns regarding racism. For a person of color, a boundary can look like choosing which allies and groups to share their experience with and what type of media to consume.

For further reading, we strongly urge our readers to review the work of [Derald Wing Sue](#) and colleagues, which documents additional concrete strategies to disarm microaggressions. ❖

---

## Working to Dismantle Systemic Racism

*"When I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid." – Audre Lorde*

What we have seen transpire these past few weeks in our country is not new. The history of the United States is ripe with [systemic barriers](#) to housing, health care, mental health resources, education, employment, fair treatment in the justice system, food, and even [healthy air](#) (check out [this book](#) on more about this history). We struggle to overcome these systemic factors when they feel overwhelming, causing us to feel helpless and unsure of where to start. Let's break it down into smaller steps and get to work.

**Examine your biases.** This may not sound important on a systemic level, but without this piece, you could be the one to deny a qualified candidate a job in the future because of her name or where she is from. What assumptions do you make about minority-

identified individuals and groups? Where do these come from? How can you be mindful of these assumptions, challenge them, and keep them from influencing your behavior/perpetuating systems of oppression?

**See color.** Many people say, "I don't see color," in the often well-intended desire for equal rights and treatment. But when we take a colorblind approach, we cannot see patterns of disproportionate impact in our systems. If we don't see it, we can't intervene. On a more personal level, when we do not acknowledge race, we ignore the background that informs a person's worldview and experience and assume it to be the white default. Some people fear that they are being racist if they notice someone else's race, but ignoring it actually makes you more likely to hurt them.

**Listen to and elevate melanated voices.** Realize that your experience is not the only experience. Expand what you read to include diverse authors, follow people who are different from you on social media, and share their perspectives with others. Elevate individuals of color in your classes, group projects, organizations, and workplaces.

**Where do you have influence?** Author Ijeoma Oluo has said, "You have to realize that racism is built into the bones of pretty much every organization, every structure in society, which means you have to build anti-racism into the bones if you want to fix it." What are your "organizations?" Whether it's your family, your classroom, your org, UIC, the city of Chicago, etc., examine your spheres of influence and where you can start conversations about how to make things better. Consider using this [organizational self-assessment](#) to better understand how your organizations can improve.

**Civic Engagement.** Explore the policies and politics of your local police department, aldermen, prosecutors, etc. (for many specific ideas, click [here](#)). Contact your alderman, mayor, representative, senator, governor, etc. Sign petitions. Vote, especially in local elections; [Ballot Ready](#) is a helpful tool for reviewing candidates and seeing what organizations have endorsed them.

**Intervene.** While some systemic racism is best approached from a prevention standpoint, you will likely catch something in the moment that does not sit right with you. [Say something](#) and suggest alternatives for change. You can report [bias incidents at UIC here](#) and [discrimination/harassment incidents at UIC here](#).

**Appreciate, don't appropriate.** [Cultural appropriation](#) happens when we take something from another culture and use it in a way that was never intended by the original culture.

*Continued on page 5*



It feels terrible when someone takes something dear to your culture and entirely misuses it, or even popularizes this misuse. If you spot this in yourself or others, seek education about that item or activity and consider how you can honor and share its true meaning.

**Support minority-owned businesses.** From restaurants to banks, from yoga studios to legal services, check out [Black Wallet](#) or [Official Black Wall Street](#) for ideas, and consider [one of these restaurants](#) next time you order out. Avoid patronizing businesses who abuse minorities and perpetuate systemic racism.

**Donate time and other resources.** Identify organizations that impact systems and donate money, time, or other resources; you can find some ideas on our Resources page below. Join listservs to stay up to date on how you can continue to help; some, like [Showing Up for Racial Justice](#), have local chapters.

**Come to terms with shame.** You might be feeling ashamed of your privilege or of times in the past when you harmed others or could have done more. Shame tends to be paralyzing and can get in our way when it comes to making important change. Reckon with your past, own your mistakes and acknowledge your growth, and nondefensively seek forgiveness where it is needed, including with yourself. You can start this process by completing a workbook like [Me and White Supremacy](#), [applying Brene Brown's shame framework to racial inequity](#), reading books like [White Fragility](#), [My Grandmother's Hands](#), and [How I Shed My Skin](#), and participating in [webinars](#). ❖

---

*This special edition is dedicated to the life and memory of Breonna Taylor, who would have been 27 today, June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020.*



Art by Chicago-based artist [Shirien Damra](#), used with permission ([@shirien.createes](#)).

## UPCOMING WORKSHOPS/EVENTS

### ENGAGING ANTIRACISM: READINGS AND REFLECTIONS ON WHITE PRIVILEGE

TUESDAYS FROM NOON-1PM, STARTING JUNE 23RD

A foundational piece of dismantling racism is listening to and supporting Black communities; it is also critical to address privilege that enables racism on individual and systemic levels. The Counseling Center, the UIC Dialogue Initiative and the Office of the Dean of Students welcome all students, faculty, and staff to attend a five-week virtual series on exploring and confronting white privilege and engaging with anti-racism. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

### WOMEN OF COLOR INTERPERSONAL PROCESS GROUP

MONDAYS FROM 3:00-4:30PM

This ongoing interpersonal process group is for students who identify as women of color and have both an awareness of and openness to discussing in group the ways in which their minority identities impact their experiences. This group has been running for several years and continues to be open to new members. If you are interested, please contact the Counseling Center (312-996-3490) to schedule an initial consultation to see if this is the right group for you.

### STUDENT OF COLOR INTERPERSONAL PROCESS GROUP

THURSDAYS FROM 2:05-3:25PM

This ongoing interpersonal process group is for students who identify as a person of color and have both an awareness of and openness to discussing in group the ways in which their minority identities impact their experiences. This group began about two years ago and continues to be open to new members. If you are interested, please contact the Counseling Center (312-996-3490) to schedule an initial consultation to see if this is the right group for you.

---

# Resources

## Resources for Black Individuals and Communities

### Self-Care

[Black Lives Matter: Meditations](#)  
[Emotionally Restorative Self-Care for People of Color](#)  
[Liberate Meditation App \(by and for people of color\)](#)  
[Radical Self-Care in the Face of Mounting Racial Stress](#)  
[Talking about Race: Self-Care](#)  
[Tips for Self-Care: When Police Brutality Has You Questioning Humanity and Social Media is Enough](#)

### Coping Strategies

[Black Lives Matter: Healing Action Toolkit](#)  
[Common Coping Strategies](#)  
[Discrimination: What It Is and How To Cope](#)  
[Family Care, Community Care and Self-Care](#)  
[Tool Kit: Healing in the Face of Cultural Trauma](#)  
[Filling Our Cups: 4 Ways People of Color Can Foster Mental Health and Practice Restorative Healing](#)  
[Grief is a Direct Impact of Racism: Eight Ways to Support Yourself](#)  
[Healing Justice is How We Can Sustain Black Lives](#)  
[Proactively Coping with Racism](#)  
[Racial Trauma is Real](#)  
[Racism Recovery Steps](#)  
[Toolkit for Healing in the Face of Cultural Trauma \(English and Spanish\)](#)

### Supporting Each Other

[Supporting Kids of Color in the Wake of Racialized Violence](#)  
[Tips for Supporting Each Other](#)  
[We Heal Too](#)

### Tools for Confronting Racism

[Black Lives Matter: Conflict Resolution Toolkit](#)  
[Black Lives Matter: Trayvon Taught Me Toolkit \(in Spanish\)](#)  
[Disarming Racial Microaggressions: Microintervention Strategies for Targets, White Allies, and Bystanders](#)

## Antiracism Resources

### Tools for Confronting Racism

[75 Things White People Can Do for Racial Justice](#)  
[Black Lives Matter: A Toolkit for Trayvon](#)  
[Confronting Racism](#)  
[Disarming Racial Microaggressions: Microintervention Strategies for Targets, White Allies, and Bystanders](#)  
[Race, Power, and Policy: Dismantling Structural Racism](#)  
[Racism Interruptions \(A Guide for What to Say\)](#)  
[Ten Ways to Fight Hate: A Community Response Guide](#)

### Exercises

[Expressive Writing Prompts to Use if You've Been Accused of White Fragility, Spiritual Bypassing, or White Privilege](#)  
[Harvard Implicit Bias Test](#)  
[Racism Scale](#)

### Learning Opportunities

[Antiracism Learning Opportunities through Enrich Chicago](#)  
[Detour-Spotting for White Antiracists](#)  
[How Well-Intentioned White Families Can Perpetuate Racism](#)  
[Talking About Race: Being Antiracist](#)  
[White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack](#)

### Teaching about Racism

[Antiracist Toolkit for Teachers and Researchers](#)  
[How to Talk to Kids about Race: Books and Resources](#)  
[Resources for Educators Focused on Antiracist Learning and Teaching](#)  
[The Urgent Need for Antiracist Education](#)  
[Toolkit for Teaching about Racism](#)  
[Toolkit for Teaching about Racism](#)

## UIC Resources

[African American Academic Network](#)  
[African American Cultural Center](#)  
[African Student Council at UIC](#)  
[CHANCE Program](#)  
[Chancellor's Committee on the Status of Blacks](#)  
[Diversity Education at UIC \(click \[here\]\(#\) or \[here\]\(#\)\)](#)  
[National Association of Black Accountants at UIC](#)  
[National Society of Black Engineers at UIC](#)  
[Office of the Vice Provost for Diversity](#)  
[Reporting Bias Events at UIC](#)  
[Reporting Discrimination and Harassment at UIC](#)  
[The Society of Black Urban Planners at UIC](#)  
[TRIO](#)  
[UIC Black Graduate Students](#)  
[UIC Black Student Union](#)  
[UIC Campus African American Student Resource Guide](#)  
[UIC Counseling Center](#)  
[UIC Dialogue Initiative](#)  
[UIC Students for African American Sisterhood](#)  
[UIC Wellness Center](#)

## Books to Read

*On the Experience of Racism*  
[A People's History of the United States](#) by Howard Zinn  
[Citizen: An American Lyric](#) by Claudia Rankine  
[Eloquent Rage: A Black Feminist Discovers Her Superpower](#) by Dr. Brittney Cooper  
[I'm Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness](#) by Austin Channing Brown  
[The Bridge Called My Back, Writings by Radical Women of Color](#) edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa  
[My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies](#) by Resmaa Menakem  
[The Racial Healing Handbook](#) by Anneliese A. Singh  
[Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in The Cafeteria?](#) By Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum

### On Antiracism

[How to Be an Antiracist](#) by Dr. Ibram X. Kendi  
[Me and White Supremacy: Combat Racism, Change the World, and Become a Good Ancestor](#) by Layla Saad  
[So You Want to Talk about Race](#) by Ijeoma Oluo  
[The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness](#) by Michelle Alexander  
[White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk about Racism](#) by Dr. Robin DiAngelo

## Organizations to Support

[Black Emotional and Mental Health Collective](#)  
[Black Girls Smiles](#)  
[Black Lives Matter - Chicago](#)  
[Black Women's Blueprint](#)  
[Chicago Regional Organizing for Antiracism](#)  
[Color of Change](#)  
[Enrich Chicago](#)  
[Equal Justice Initiative](#)  
[National Association for the Advancement of Colored People](#)  
[Showing Up for Racial Justice](#)  
[Sister Song](#)  
[The Audre Lorde Project](#)  
[The Antiracist Research and Policy Center](#)  
[The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights](#)  
[The Loveland Foundation](#)  
[The Nina Pop and the Tony McDade Mental Health Recovery Fund for Black Trans People](#)  
[The Foundation for Black Women's Wellness](#)

[Click here to learn how to support South and West-side businesses and communities impacted by civil unrest](#)  
[For Chicagoans impacted by civil unrest who are seeking household needs](#)