

Many Friends are disturbed and feeling somewhat helpless with respect to the events in Ferguson, Missouri. Few, if any of us, will be directly involved in the events in that town. If we find that we are led to do so, however, there are steps we can take to have a positive effect on the underlying issues.

Some important facts about the shooting are, at this writing, still in dispute. There are, however, underlying issues of racism experienced by many citizens of Ferguson that have led to the demonstrations. Those issues will persist regardless of how, if ever, current factual disputes about the shooting are resolved.

I think the best ways to respond can be grouped into two categories: 1) learning how racism has worked and is working in our country and 2) based on that learning, discern our leading and find others who share that leading with whom to work.

Understanding How Racism Works

Understanding the working of racism is complex even for those who have been the victims of it. Racism affects every aspect of life in one way or another.

With respect to the events in Ferguson, the **criminal justice system** is the focus. When I attended an all-white elementary school over 60 years ago I was assured that a police officer was my friend and potential helper. The experiences of many parents of African-American sons, however, have persuaded them that it would be dangerous if they told their sons that. Those sons can get through life only by spending a crucial period of their lives as persons who many law enforcement officers find threatening and provocative. Often their parents conclude that they must teach their sons very specific ways of behaving during encounters with the police in order to stay safe. An event like the one in Ferguson reminds parents that, even though they provide that training, their child may still be harmed due to events beyond the parents' control.

Even though it focusses on the War on Drugs, which was not directly involved in the events in Ferguson, Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* gives a good introduction of how racism works in the criminal justice system to harm unfairly both African-Americans and Latinos.

Housing discrimination through redlining neighborhoods where home loans would be unavailable and restrictive covenants where home owners agreed never to sell to black people have created segregated neighborhoods resulting in lower wealth for African-Americans compared to white people with the same income level, poorly funded schools because those school are funded by property taxes, and ghetto areas where arrests happen much more frequently. A good source on this topic is *Not in My Neighborhood: How Bigotry Shaped a Great American City* by Antero Pietila focusing on Baltimore.

Healthcare is another arena for racism as demonstrated by studies showing the prevalence of different diagnoses and treatment plans for patients of color compared to white patients with the same symptoms and even the same level of income. A major U.S. government report entitled *Unequal Health Outcomes in the United States: Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care Treatment and Access, The Role of Social and Environmental Determinants of Health and the Responsibility of the State* in 2008 authoritatively documents this problem. A personal history of the struggle to get doctors to address this issue is laid out in Augustus White's book, *Seeing Patients: Unconscious Bias in Health Care*.

The effects of racism on well-educated women of color within **academia** are thoroughly documented in the recent compendium, *Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia*, edited by Gabriella Gutierrez y Muhs, Yolanda Flores Niemann, Carmen G. Gonzalez and Angela P. Harris.

Of course people of color and others must also cope with individual hurtful behavior—sometimes intentional and sometimes not—called "**microaggressions**." The definitive work on this topic is Derald Wing Sue's, *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation*. That book cites studies documenting that the stress associated with dealing with microaggressions shortens lives. A very good, but less academic, discussion of microaggressions is *But I Don't See You As Asian: Curating Conversations about Race* by Bruce Reyes-Chow.

Across the board one can learn the ways in which the effects of overt discrimination in the past are maintained today even though those overt practices are now outlawed by reading *Reproducing Racism: How Everyday Choices Lock in White Advantage* by Daria Roithmayr. Another good survey of the length and breadth of racism

in America is Ta-Nehisi Coates' May 2014 article in *The Atlantic* entitled *The Case for Reparations*, <http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2014/05/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>.

As suggested by Janée Woods in her recent blog post, <http://janeewoods.com/2014/08/14/becoming-a-white-ally-to-black-people-in-the-aftermath-of-the-michael-brown-murder/>, subscribing to diverse voices of color online, such as The Root, Colorlines, or This Week in Blackness can also help.

Taking Action with Others

As we move toward action we can find support from organizations that provide training workshops on working in coalition for social justice such as Training for Change, The Peoples Institute for Survival and Beyond (Friends Meeting of Washington hosted an Undoing Racism training by that organization earlier this year), or attending the Facing Race or White Privilege Conference. The next White Privilege Conference will be in Louisville next March. Friends General Conference is hosting that conference in 2016 in Philadelphia and is looking for help now from Quakers to organize it.

Janée Woods' blog post makes two recommendations that certainly resonate with Friends. She recommends learning about nonviolent resistance and provides two links for online resources on that topic. She also recommends working with faith leaders. Clearly AFSC and FCNL are also good resources for us.

Finally, two of her long-term recommendations are important:

1. **“Don't be afraid to be unpopular.** Let's be realistic. If you start calling out all the racism you witness (and it will be a lot once you know what you're looking at) some people might not want to hang out with you as much. That's a risk you'll need to accept.”
2. **“Don't give up.** We're 400 years into this racist system and it's going to take a long, long, long time to dismantle these atrocities. The antiracism movement is a struggle for generations, not simply the hot button issue of the moment. Transformation of a broken system doesn't happen quickly or easily.”

A Quaker Response to Events in Ferguson, MO

What Can I Do?

**By David Etheridge
October 2014**

**BYM Working Group on
Racism**