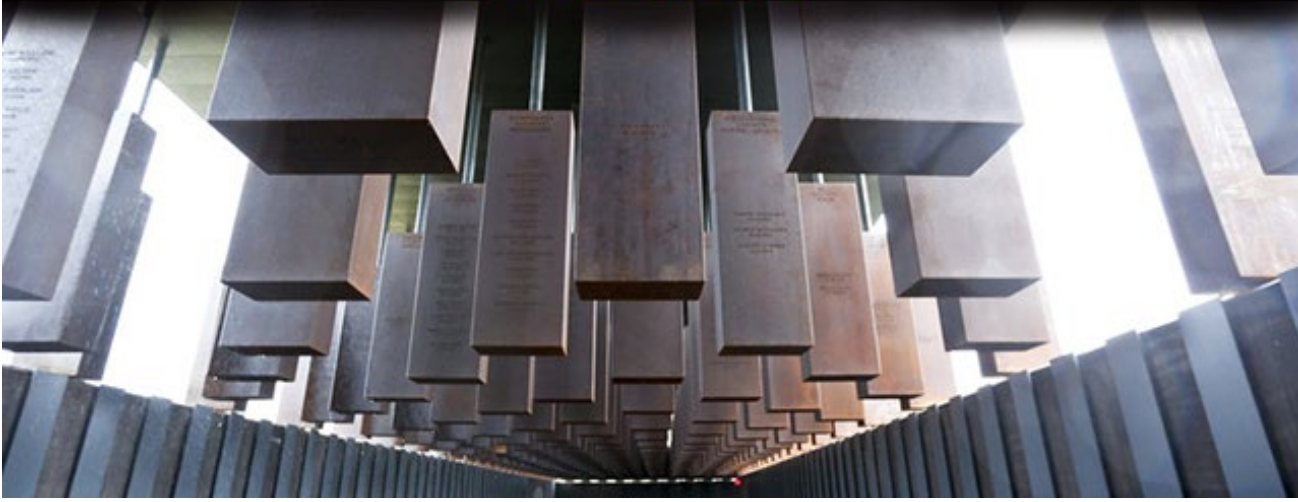


ALEXANDRIA COMMUNITY REMEMBRANCE PROJECT NEWSLETTER



November Edition

The Inheritance of Racism

Racism is obvious. Racism is nuance. Racism lurks in every interaction and conversation we have - whether we are aware of it or not.

One of the more cherished outcomes of the ACRP pilgrimage to Alabama are the new friendships that were formed, many across communities. These relationships are in addition to those developed over several years of committee work by ACRP members.

The experience has created a space where many are eager to engage in important conversations on race and racial justice. Though eager, as a community we need to continue to build our engagement skills.



Being immersed in the huge truths on display at the National Memorial for Peace and Justice and the Legacy Museum while also hearing testimony from those who witnessed civil rights battles in Montgomery and Selma was a moving and at times emotive experience. Yet, the pilgrimage was not without its challenges. When 165 people of different races, ages, and backstories traveled together to learn about systemic racism and racial terror hate crimes, there was bound to be a reckoning with past behavior and beliefs. At times feelings were hurt, tears were shed, and moments when people had to walk away from each other. Even with the challenges, pilgrimage participants pushed through their pain and discomfort to understand each other. In the end, the participants felt the ACRP Pilgrimage was a life-changing event.

At the closing dinner, Trauma Therapist Simone Jacobs, who has been a partner on our ACRP journey since the beginning offered powerful remarks that helped us. Her words touched everyone in the room in their own way - and for them, she received a standing ovation. Her remarks were a reminder that everyone is at a different place in their social justice learning, and we still have much to do.

Ms. Jacobs spoke from the heart and did not write down her comments. The following points reflect some of what she shared, and include resources to help us prepare for future cross-community dialogues on race.

For the white community:

In 1970, white poet, essayist, farmer, Wendell Berry, wrote in *The Hidden Wound*,

“I am trying to establish the outlines of an understanding of myself in regard to what was fated to be the continuing crisis of my life, the crisis of racial awareness – the sense of being doomed by my history to be, if not always a racist, then a man always limited by the inheritance of racism, condemned to be always conscious of the necessity not to be a racist, to be always dealing deliberately with the reflexes of racism that are embedded in my mind as deeply at least in the language I speak.”

Race is a social construct designed to justify the unjustifiable. It was a rationalization that did not make sense in the past and continues to not make sense today. On top of that, society has made racism a zero-sum game: racist means bad and if a person is good, or their intentions are good, then that person can't behave in a racist way or say a racist thing. The outcome of which is defensiveness, making it nearly impossible for Black people to explain their experience with the words or behavior of a white person. While at the same time, making it impossible for the white person to grow and change.

Each of our white members would argue that they have good intentions – why else would they be taking part in ACRP? But sometimes a lack of lived experience or awareness of how integrated white supremacy is into the culture, as well as the centering of whiteness that makes being white the default means that white people often say or do the wrong thing. It is important to move past the good/bad binary, past defensiveness, and instead slow down, breath, listen, take risks, be vulnerable, and be open.

Suggested readings:

[How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Discussing Race](#), Jay Smooth (TEDX).

[“So You've Been Called Out. A White Person's Guide To Doing Better.”](#) By Tess Martin.

[White Activists Causing Burnout Among Racial Justice Activists of Color in the US](#). By Paul Gorski and Naura Erakat.

[Why I'm No Longer Talking To White People About Race](#), By Reni Eddo-Lodge.

[When White Women Cry: How White Women's Tears Oppress Women of Color](#),” Mamta Motwani Accapadi.

[Nice Racism: How Progressive White People Perpetuate Racial Harm](#). By Robin Diangelo.

[How To Be An AntiRacist](#), Ibram X. Kendi.

For the Black community:

In her book *Nice Racism*, Dr. Diangelo quotes Anike Nailah, who said, “Being with white progressives is like being a driving instructor and having someone who does not know how to drive but thinks that they do get in the car with you. They're at the wheel, but because of how they see themselves, they can't hear you, and if they do hear you, they're not really listening. And that makes them dangerous.”

Later in the same book, African American [Kelsey Blackwell](#), who works with women of color, is quoted on the topic of cross-community dialogue on race. “Being in a space where white people are starting to wake up to their white cultural conditioning is heartbreaking for me,” she said. But much more important was her next point, that Black people who are “up for being in conversations with white people about race” are offering a gift in the service of liberation. She admits it requires “tremendous energy, patience, bravery and effort” and it's not every person of color's work to do.

While most Black ACRP members are likely among those who are “up for being in conversation with white people about race” that shouldn't be the assumption. At the closing banquet, Jacobs told Black pilgrimage participants to “stop taking care of white people.” Even though society and often white people make Black people feel like they have to take care of white people, they do not and should not. Jacobs also relieved the Black participants of having to represent their entire community.

We hope Jacobs can reconstruct her comments from the closing banquet. In the meantime, ACRP hopes the readings shared in this newsletter will validate the lived experience of Black community members.

In the News

The Pilgrimage Slide Show, on the last night of our pilgrimage, we shared a slide show that photographer Michael Karikitan made for us. We have had many requests to view it and it is now available to [watch here](#).

If you haven't seen the *Washington Post* article by Ted Mellnik and Andrew Van Dam entitled, "[How Mixed-Race Neighborhoods Quietly Became the Norm in the U.S.](#)" take a minute to read it. They mined the 2020 Census and discovered a milestone for the US: "For the first time in modern American history, most White people live in mixed-race neighborhoods." They describe it as a "tectonic" shift from a generation ago when 78 percent of White people lived in predominantly White neighborhoods and four of every five people were also White. The article is an indication that it's a good time for us to start engaging in cross-community dialogue on race, history, and culture.

Virginia's State Board of Education will be voting on new history standards. Read the [Richmond Times Dispatch](#) on how it affects the teaching of the legacy of slavery.

Upcoming Events

The Montpelier Descendants Committee will hold a Virtual Memorialization Workshop Thursday, Nov. 18, and Friday, Nov. 19, 2022. It is free.

The two-day virtual workshop (1 p.m.-5 p.m. on Thursday and 9 a.m.-1:30 p.m. on Friday) is being held to plan the memorialization of the site where the remains of enslaved people rest at Montpelier. There will be speakers from other descendant communities from around the region and nation talking about their experience with memorialization, archaeology of cemetery sites, and broader interpretive methods and themes for honoring the contributions of our ancestors.

[Register here.](#)

Committee Reports

Alexandria Community Remembrance Project Pilgrimage Committee met virtually on October 24 to thank members for their work planning the pilgrimage. There was some discussion of reconvening in the future to plan social justice day trips, but for now, the committee will not be meeting until further notice.

[Joseph McCoy](#) [Benjamin Thomas](#).

[For more information](#)

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ACRP@alexandriava.gov

The Alexandria Community Remembrance Project (ACRP) is a city-wide initiative dedicated to helping Alexandria understand its history of racial terror hate crimes and to work toward creating a welcoming community bound by equity and inclusion.

**Office of Historic Alexandria
City of Alexandria, Virginia**



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