



Committed to Organizational Excellence in the Nonprofit Sector

The Resource Center NEWS

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Last month we featured the "challenge of diversity." This month we are beginning a 3-part series setting the foundation for meeting this challenge for real; not for quota or legal or cosmetic reasons. Only that way will our "diversified" agencies best serve our constituency and our community at large.

Some of the information will be new to some; may it serve to enlighten. Some information may be "old;" may the series serve to deepen your commitment.

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Understanding Institutional Racism

By Joseph Barndt and Charles Ruehle

A society is composed of a great number of institutions. They may be either private or public, but all are interconnected through their common task of helping the society to function. Institutions give expression to the organized activities of a community and serve its various needs.

The institutions in our society are countless, yet each purports to serve a specific clientele. Governmental institutions claim as their clientele all citizens within their jurisdiction. The House of Representatives, the Senate, and all its committees and offices; the Supreme Court and the separate units of the judicial system; the White House, and the hundreds upon hundreds of departments and offices of government — each functions as a separate institutional entity. Each state replicates the federal image with offices and agencies; local municipalities do likewise; each city hall, library, police department, and hospital is a public institution.

Each and every business and industry in our nation, large and small, is an institution including factories, offices, or retail stores. Within the communications industry, each newspaper, radio and TV station, magazine, and computer network is an institution. Every school and university, each sports team and franchise, every art gallery, dance studio, and a thousand, thousand more groups are institutions. The list seems almost as numerous as the stars and constellations. Theoretically, each institution represents and collectively acts in the name of those whom it claims as its members, its owner, its clientele, or its citizens.

These are institutions of which we speak when we address the question of institutional racism. In this light, we address this article primarily to a white audience with the hope that our analysis will form a foundation for creating new strategies to dismantle racism.

Institutional Power at Work

When we examine institutional racism, the issue of power must be emphasized. Racism is more than bigotry or racial prejudice — having distorted opinions about people of other races. Racism is backed up by power — it is the power to enforce one's prejudice.

As our nation oppresses its people of color, our personal bigotry and prejudice do not cause the primary damage. Rather, the damage is done by racism that has

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been institutionally empowered. The simple reality is that the institutions, listed above, which theoretically represent all people in a fair and equal way do not do so.

These are the forces that make us, as individuals, into racists. They are the forces that transform individual prejudice into corporate racist action. Through these institutions, the subordination and exploitation of America's people of color take place.

We might understand this better if, like people of color, we were on the receiving end of racist educational, housing, welfare, police, labor, political, and economic institutional activity. Then we would see that racism is more than the actions of an individual teacher, real estate agent, social worker, police officer, ward leader, or bank teller, as devastating as that can be. It is the institutional structure, organization, policies, and practices that these people represent.

Institutions have power to control lives, but people of color have no reciprocal power to direct and control

the institutions. Consciously and unconsciously, these institutions have been designed to benefit the majority of Americans, to the detriment and oppression of the minority.

As we turn to a more detailed examination, let us maintain our awareness of the power these organizations wield over people of color, who are the target of institutional racism, and over ourselves, who are simultaneously its prisoners, its functionaries, and its beneficiaries.

Unmasking the Institutions

Institutional racism is practiced in two ways, which we will call "direct" and "indirect." Direct institutional racism is always conscious and intentional, openly practiced without apology. Indirect institutional racism may be intentional or unintentional. When intentional, indirect racism is deliberately disguised or hidden from public awareness. However, indirect racism which is unintentional, is far more complex. It exists with a life of its own and is extremely difficult to eradicate.

Direct Institutional Racism

Conscious, intentional racism, practiced openly, with the force of the law and without danger of serious disapproval, was once the only form of institutional racism. Until the 1960s, there was little need for any other

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kind. At first, the institution of slavery required little legal control. But soon a need developed for laws to govern the behavior of slaves and, to a lesser degree, of the slavemasters. Following emancipation, and the end of reconstruction, laws were created for effective segregation and control.

Likewise, a body of laws and several institutions we created to control Native Americans, on and off reservations. African Americans and Native Americans were the chief targets, but Hispanics and Asians were also excluded from eating, sleeping,

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The RESOURCE CENTER is a program of M.A.U.D., Ltd. to assist community based organizations by providing training and consultation in organization development, financial management, leadership development, personnel management, fundraising, and community organizing. The RESOURCE CENTER provides an information and referral service on management and group development problems and maintains a library.

The Resource Center News is a monthly publication which provides information on training opportunities and other topics pertinent to the effective management of nonprofit organizations. Subscriptions are \$20 per year; free to M.A.U.D. member groups.

M.A.U.D. Staff

M.A.U.D.'s Mission Statement

M.A.U.D. promotes the organizational effectiveness of non-profit groups dealing with the broad scope of urban issues. M.A.U.D. is committed to the empowerment of nonprofit organizations through community-based decision-making, leadership development, effective management, resource sharing and other collaborative efforts.

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residing, walking, riding, working, playing, worshipping, voting, or doing virtually anything at the same time or place in which white people were doing these same things.

It is impossible to comprehend institutional racism today without understanding its connection with the legalized system that was only recently dissolved. Each practice of institutional racism still in force today can be historically traced to those conscious, intentional, and legal activities of the past.

Residential segregation by housing and the real estate industry is an excellent example of deliberate and historically traceable institutional racism. Segregated housing is no accident and our own communities have not remained mostly white because "those people" did not want to live there. Almost every American city and town has a separate area, a "ghetto," where African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, or Native Americans were permitted to live. Public records show that these communities exist because institutional decisions were consciously made by the political bodies holding power in each city, town and county.

Almost any area of public and private institutional life yields examples which you can investigate in your own setting. The segregation and poor quality of ghetto schools was produced by intentional design, traceable to decisions of local school boards. The tiny number of people of color holding management positions in business and industry is no accident. White exclusiveness in most labor unions, high crime rates among people of color and their predominance in prison populations — these and a thousand other manifestations of institutional racism can only be understood in light of

historically traceable institutional decisions.

Indirect Racism Takes Over

Civil rights legislation of the 1960s eliminated major portions of legalized institutional racism. According to the law, people of color could now eat, sleep, work, play, worship, vote, own property, and do anything at the same time and the same place as white people. Legally, the long struggle has paid off. Direct institutional racism had been effectively eliminated within the United States. However, before the victory could be celebrated, it became clear that institutional racism was not coming to an end but was going underground.

Today it is clear that the end of de jure (legalized) racism has failed to bring about the end of de facto (actual) racism. Direct institutional racism has been replaced by indirect forms, intentional or unintentional, that are, in many ways, more powerful and destructive than before, especially because they are more difficult to detect and eliminate.

Many devious methods have been developed to intentionally perpetuate racism in indirect ways. Although many people are dedicated to bring about changes that will help achieve a racially just society, it is impossible to exaggerate the extent of the duplicity and treachery still being practiced by many of our nation's private and public leaders in order to control and exploit people of color in our society.

Instances of intentional indirect racism are to be found in every area where direct racism once flourished. When it was legal, the real estate industry simply refused to show or sell property to a person of color. Now

ingenious schemes and systems of "steering" customers toward or away from locations primarily designated for one particular racial group are used. Likewise, banks that once gave or refused mortgages to anyone they chose, have created such strategies as "red-lining" to achieve similar results. Recent studies have documented racial disparities in mortgage lending in major U.S. cities.

Employers who once accepted or rejected workers according to their personal racist views, have developed other criteria to disqualify and exclude unwanted persons. Educational standards are manipulated, residential requirements, age, height, and weight limitations are added. Governmental elections and representative appointments have been influenced, by the secret gerrymandering of political boundaries. Unlike decisions of the past, these deliberate decisions are rarely recorded and, therefore, seldom traceable.

Not all of these practices are actually illegal. Often they are by-products of what is perceived as "good business." In recent decades, major banks as well as supermarket chains and other commercial businesses have closed their branches in poor urban communities. Are such decisions judged simply on the basis of a financial bottom line or do institutions also have responsibilities to the society?

Here we enter into an area where indirect racism may be unintentional. Many manifestations of indirect

racism are by-products of institutional policies. It may even be that while on one level an institution honestly seeks to be nondiscriminatory, on another level it continues intentional or unintentional indirect racism. If only practices and not their results are scrutinized, they may appear, or

"Racism is still at work if there are no significant changes from the time when direct racism was practiced."

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Boardup Survey

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tion showed up in force, as did several personnel from the local WHEDA office. Several prominent department heads, including Leo Ries, also dedicated their morning to the effort. City Budget Director Anne Brooker and Strategic Planner Ken Kinney devoted their afternoon to surveying a section of Milwaukee's inner city neighborhoods.

Data Center Takes Lead

Working closely with the city, the M.A.U.D. Neighborhood Data Center took the lead in recruiting community personnel. A diverse and talented group of people from ten neighborhood organizations gathered to staff the survey (Harambee, Metcalfe Park, Milwaukee Christian Center, Near North Neighbors Association, Sherman Park Community Association, Walker's Point Development Corp., West End Community Association, Westside Conservation Corp., and Westside Housing Co-op). In all, twenty-four teams of surveyors made up the roster.

Valuable Data Collected

The overall success of the survey collaboration was due in no small part to the underlying importance of the boardup data. Utilized by city planners and community groups, the boardup data is one measure of a neighborhood's health. Neighborhood organizations can target boardup properties for rehabilitation or homeownership programs. Organizers can identify potential trouble spots and act quickly to alleviate consequences. The data recorded by field-workers will be carefully checked by city workers and entered into the city's main property file. Community organizations and city staffers will have access to the data as quickly as city personnel can complete this process.



Happening In Here

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"Reform;" and an anti-slumlord campaign.

Minority Trendsletter. Fall, 1992. Published by the Center for Third World Organizing, Oakland, CA. **Features:** Radical Reinvestment; "Heard in the 'Hood"—An 'Undue Burden' on Women of Color; and, Cross-Country Campaign Field Reports.

The Organizer Mailing. July, 1992. Published by Organized Training Center, San Francisco. **Features:** 143 pages of brief reprints of newspaper press clips and brief articles on topics of concern to organizers under the following headings: Economics, Ideas, Religion, Politics, Labor, Community Organizing Reports from the Field, the L.A. Riots, Business, Book Reviews, Humor, and "What's Left Over."

Task Force Proposes Standards and Guidelines for In-Kind Gifts

Last November, the Association of Evangelical Relief and Development Agencies appointed a five-member GIK Interagency Task Force to draft new standards and guidelines for the operation of an ethical gifts-in-kind program. It is felt that new guidelines are needed, since neither the Internal Revenue Service, Generally Accepted Accounting Principals, or state regulations provide adequate guidance in this area.

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actually be, innocent of intentional racism. The results, however, are what count. Racism is still at work if there are no significant changes from the time when direct racism was practiced.

Indirect racism is evident when institutional representatives justify their lack of success in hiring or promoting employees of color by saying, "We want to, but we can't find qualified people." A process of deliberate and direct racism throughout our history created the conditions that prevented people of color from becoming properly educated and well qualified for a host of occupations. Now indirect racism rejects them because they are poorly educated and ill-trained.

We have looked briefly at direct and indirect racism, next month we take a further step to look at the various levels and expressions of racism within institutions and organizations.

The task force that was appointed includes representatives from World Vision, MAP International, Food for the Hungry, International Aid and World Emergency Relief. The task force has met several times and has a draft of proposed guidelines and standards for the operation of a gifts-in-kind program. They have sought the input of national representatives of two of the Big 6 accounting firms, but would welcome any input and discussion from other interested parties.

If you would like a copy of the proposed guidelines and standards, write to Gary Paisley, GIK Interagency Task Force, 7729 E. Greenway Rd., Scottsdale, AZ 85260. (602)998-3100.