In the 1970s, the inner city of Battle Creek, Michigan, became an economically depressed area, due to the closing of a military base nearby. By 1990, there were fifty recognized crack houses within a mile of downtown. Battle Creek Neighborhoods Incorporated, a community development financial institution, stepped in. Their approach has been to focus on lending to people who are willing to buy particular community blocks rather than to buyers of housing units scattered throughout the city. Their loans come with a requirement to improve the property and to participate in improving the quality of life on the block. For example, they sponsor “best of neighborhood” contests—Best Front Porch, Best Back Yard, Best Group—that encourage home maintenance and improvement. Brenda Sue Woods wasn’t going to participate in the Porch contest at first, but then decided to try. When she took first place, “I was just screaming like I won something on The Price Is Right.” The emphasis on neighborhoods will enable housing values to rise in the area.

The Hawai’i Alliance for Community-Based Economic Development, a statewide nonprofit organization, provides loans not to individuals, but to groups. For example, a group of young people put in a proposal with the goal of “reconnection with their elders.” One of the ways they used the loan was for a community van to transport those elders to needed services.

In a variety of locations, nonprofit organizations and government entities are experimenting with wealth-creation frameworks that are “inclusive, community-driven, and action oriented, protecting community, cultural, and environmental concerns while shielding individual private rights.”

These efforts are road signs to the future.

**Ten Things You Can Do to Improve Race Relations**

Charles A. Gallagher

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The study of race and ethnic relations in the United States can be a rather depressing and disempowering undertaking. Ongoing institutional racism in education, employment, housing, lending, and law enforcement; continued wealth and income disparities between racial groups; and the persistence of racial prejudice and discrimination in most spheres of social life may leave one with the impression that nothing can be done to improve race relations. The modern civil rights movement was three hundred years in the making, and while movement toward racial equality has been substantial, racism and racial inequality still infect our nation and poison civic life. Such prejudice and inequality persist in part because changing the institutional barriers that allocate occupational and educational opportunity is a slow and difficult task. Upward mobility for different racial and ethnic groups is typically measured in generations rather than decades.

But the problem is not merely one of institutional laws and policies, nor a lack of institutional will. The intolerant attitudes of the outer races toward the inner races, their stereotyping, and their fear of them has been, and will remain, an essential characteristic of American society. The prides of individuals are closely linked to the pride of their groups. But the pride of the inner races is based on acceptance of their group by others as inferior. When others reject them, they reject themselves.

1. **Tall</p>

Respect and love everyone, regardless of their race or ethnic background. Race is not a intelligent or usable concept. It is impossible to find a natural or rational basis for the categorization of people into groups on the basis of race or ethnicity. The concept of race is a social construct, a product of human imagination, and therefore subject to change. It is an illusion that one can find a natural link between the races. The idea of one race is as absurd as the idea of only one country. There is no one race or one nation. All people are members of a larger family.

2. **Avoid</p>

Be mindful of your own attitudes. If you are on the receiving end of such attitudes, please report them to your employer or school officials. If you are in a position of authority, please take action. When you encounter situations that arise from racial or ethnic prejudice, take action.
than decades or years. One is tempted to throw one's hands in the air and yell, "There is nothing I can do!!" But there is. You have the power to influence your family, friends, and peers by discussing the topics raised in this class. At the individual, interpersonal, and community level you can engage in activities to promote equal opportunity while building bridges between people from different racial backgrounds. Understanding the root causes of ethnic and racial inequality in the United States and examining in this class the facts, theories, evidence, and examples that pertain to such inequality will allow you to explain to others why racism and racial and ethnic inequality remain so stubbornly part of our culture. You now have the sociological tools to calmly, intelligently, and rationally engage in conversations with other adults about racism in America and what individuals, institutions, and the government could and should do to fashion a society where equal opportunity exists for all groups. Following are ten simple things you can do as you go about your day to raise your own and other people's consciousness about race relations and racial justice in America.

1. Talk to Your Family

Respectfully engage your friends and family in what you learned in this class. If you have family members that are racist or use stereotypes, ask them politely and nonjudgmentally why they harbor such animosity towards a whole group of people. Did they have a bad experience with someone from that group? Ask them if they have ever been the target of animosity or hatred because of their race, ethnic background, religion, or nationality. How did such an encounter make them feel? Were their parents or grandparents ever subject to such prejudice or discrimination? Why? Ask them if they think their prejudice or racism violates the American creed of equal treatment and opportunity for all regardless of group membership. If they believe in the American creed, how do they reconcile their racism or prejudice? Ask them if they believe in the golden rule that states "do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

2. Avoid Sterotypical Language

Be mindful that certain words or phrases typically mean the person is about to use stereotypes to describe a group. When you hear someone say "All black people do this ... ," or "Latinos always like to ... ," or "I never met a white person who could ... ," a red flag should go up that stereotypes are in use. Politely ask if they are referring to an individual encounter with someone from another group or if they mean to speak for thirty-eight million blacks, forty million Latinos, ten million Asians, two hundred million whites, or 2.5 million American Indians in this country. Ask the person if they really believe all people in that group actually share the same behaviors and attitudes. Is it possible that certain behaviors or beliefs only appear in one racial or ethnic group and not another?

3. Racism Isn't Funny

Don't tolerate racist jokes. If you hear a joke being told that disparages someone because of his or her group membership, stop the person from telling the joke. If they insist on finishing, ask them why they don't like black people or white people or Asians or Catholics or whomever they are ridiculing in their attempt at humor. You have many retorts to such simplistic and retrograde behavior. You might say "Hey, I don't think putting down other people is funny," or "I have gay friends, I don't want to hear you trashing them," or "My brother-in-law is black (or white or Asian or Catholic or Jewish, etc.) and I think he's great." Be willing to "take the stand" about what is appropriate public discourse. If you do not speak up and let the person know that such remarks are socially inappropriate, you are condoning their beliefs and behavior. Inaction is a form of action.

4. Be Introspective

Think back to reading 17, in which Robert Merton discussed the unprejudiced nondiscriminator. This person was not prejudiced, nor did she discriminate against anyone in any way. How can we live our lives so social or peer pressure do not push us toward racist, prejudiced, or bigoted beliefs or actions? If you find yourself being a prejudiced nondiscriminator (fair-weather illiberal) or an unprejudiced discriminator (fair-weather liberal), ask yourself how you got there. Be introspective and honest about why you acted or behaved a certain way toward someone from a different ethnic or racial group. What scared you about the situation that made you deviate from your core beliefs or values? Did you overreact? Were you defensive? If you could relive that experience, what would
you do differently? Is it possible you were socialized or taught to react the way you did? What role did peer pressure play in your actions? The most important thing you can do is to think critically about the root causes of your anxieties, attitudes, and actions. Be introspective and be willing to change how you think about groups different from your own.

5. Be a Good Citizen—Vote

Vote in every election. Take the time to find out candidates’ positions on policies that have implications for race relations. Do not support a politician whose campaign rhetoric is racially divisive or attempts to win votes by manipulating racial (or class) fears. Knowing what the issues are (and are not) requires reading a newspaper every day.

6. TV, Rap, Rock: Appeals to the Lowest Common Denominator

When you watch television, realize that you are under constant bombardment by the most simplistic and stereotypical images of ethnic and racial groups. Ask yourself which racial and ethnic groups are on prime time and how those groups are represented. Are whites, blacks, Asians, Latinos, or American Indians in a wide range of roles, or are some groups more likely to be maids, gangbangers, exotics, or lawyers? Why? What you watch on television is not just entertainment. The mass media provide the images, symbols, and narratives that shape the way we understand society. The media cement existing stereotypes and construct expectations about where groups should be placed in America’s racial hierarchy. The television industry uses stereotypes to make racial inequality look like the “normal” order of society. How are you being manipulated by the programs you watch?

7. Learn Your Family’s History

Take time to talk to the elderly people in your life. Ask your parents, aunts and uncles, neighbors, and spiritual leaders in your community about how race relations have changed since they were children. Ask your parents, grandparents, and other relatives about the Brown decision, the Civil Rights movement, Martin Luther King, Jr.’s assassination, the American Indian Movement (AIM), La Raza, and the L.A. riots. How do they explain these events? What were they doing as these monumental events unfolded? Your elders are resources. Talk to them about the past and the present.

8. Teach through Example

Be a positive role model to all the younger people in your life. If you are of college age or older, you probably have a number of children and young adults who look up to you for moral guidance. If they hear you use foul language, then in all likelihood they will too. If you speak and act in a racist manner, they will learn your racism. Explain to those who view you as a role model what it means to live in a multiracial, multiethnic society. Explain to them what the American creed and the “golden rule” mean.

9. Step Out of Your Comfort Zone

Involve yourself in activities that place you in an environment where you will be exposed to people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Think about attending museums, music events, ethnic festivals, restaurants, supermarkets, shops, or any other public place where you will share space with people different from yourself.

10. Know Thyself

Did you grow up in a community that was racially homogenous? Was your house of worship pretty much composed of people who looked like you? Are your best friends all of the same race? Was your elementary school segregated? How about your high school? What did it look like in terms of racial composition? Do you think being raised in a segregated environment shapes racial attitudes? How? How do you think being the only racial minority in most social settings might shape a person’s views of race relations? Have your ideas about race changed since you were fifteen years old? How and why? Reflect on these questions and write your answers as an essay. Circulate what you write to your friends and family. Set up a meeting to have a discussion on what you wrote and what their views on race relations in the United States are.

“If You’re Not Part of the Solution, You’re Part of the Problem.”