

**Conference Session 2.2: Justice – Social and Environmental  
Working Together to Confront Organizational Racism\***

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*“Are you not like the Kushites to me, O people of Israel?” says the Lord.  
“Did I not bring Israel out of the land of Egypt?  
And the Philistines from Caphtor, and the Arameans from Kir?”  
(Amos 9:7)*

For well over a century, the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services (JBFCS) has been helping New Yorkers through a wide range of social service programs in and around New York City. Beginning in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with services to help poor Jewish families and immigrants, it now serves some 65,000 clients from all racial, ethnic, economic, and religious backgrounds. A social work-run organization, JBFCS prides itself on a continuum of services that include residential and day treatment; domestic violence shelters; outpatient mental health clinics for adults, children, and families; programs addressing terminal illness, learning disabilities, family conflict, alcoholism, protracted unemployment, and much more. Many of our clients are people of color, and large numbers have as their first language Spanish, Russian, Mandarin, Hebrew, Creole, Yiddish, Arabic, and other tongues. The staff of well over 3,000 is also racially and culturally diverse, representing a range of professional and paraprofessional disciplines.

The organization's evolution in recent decades has been described in the following stages: 1980s: The Color-Blind Approach: Though JBFCS was officially an Equal Opportunity Employer, almost all clinical staff and management were white, and the agency functioned with what has been termed a 'color-blind' eye to programming, clinical practice, policies, and procedures. With its initially sectarian mission, its name, and its perception 'on the street,' it saw a growing need to relate to diverse populations and to take a serious look at the cultural dimensions of social work – a long-term goal of evolving the agency's own culture. But the stance was one of "looking beyond color," even when race was exercising great, even fundamental, influence in people's lives.

Early 1990s: Diversity Work: Over the decades, as the agency expanded its services and increasingly served a varied population, it sought to consciously and seriously address *diversity*, in order to improve its competence in serving such a growing and dissimilar range of communities. Sometimes through task forces, subcommittees, and trainings (large and small), these efforts forged deep bonds between staff who were male and female, Jewish, Christian, Buddhist, and Muslim, Black, White and Latino, Gay and Lesbian, old and young – psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers. There were many successes – particularly in relation to gender and religious diversity – but whenever race emerged, it was generally overshadowed by other legitimate issues. A 1991 Task Force recommendation led to many programs better reflecting the faces of the communities they served, and the agency established an ethnographic approach to cultural competence.

Late 1990s: Multiculturalism: By 1997, the view that various cultures in a society merit equal respect and scholarly interest had taken hold, and the agency began to critically analyze the clinical theories that were the basis of its practice, examining, for example, how mental health

theories were derived from a Eurocentric perspective. Again, though important work was undertaken in terms of differences in worldview, philosophy and experience, whenever an open discussion of race began to surface, tensions would arise and the subject would be tabled in favor of another pressing matter.

*Into the new millennium: **Structural Racism:*** Though there was always a sincerity and richness to all these efforts, and the variation in life experience and worldview contributed to many successes (particularly regarding religious diversity and gender differences), it became clear that issues related to race received painfully short shrift. It was not only that discussions of race tended to elicit defensiveness, shame, rage, and deep pain in our agency, as in society – but also that we lacked a common language and a clear vision for addressing **Structural Racism**.

**What is “structural racism”?** We all know what *personal* racism is – when individuals or groups say or do offensive, hurtful, demeaning, unjust things based on prejudice or hatred related to skin color. But for many centuries, truly for millennia, race and racism have burdened and impacted the lives of all people of color, debasing victims, perpetrators, and all of society in the process. Racism, in its broadest and deepest sense, is race prejudice and power, manifested individually, culturally, and institutionally.

And it’s that last adverb – *institutionally* – that we needed to focus on for the sake of staff, clients, and all constituents. We needed to redirect our attention from individual acts of meanness to the roles of leaders, managers and supervisors, to policies and procedures, and to the tone and tenor of our institutional environment.

This sounds right, and rings true, but in an agency that was dedicated to ‘doing good,’ with staff who are truly devoted to sensitively and substantively serving clients with profound and complex life-problems, any discussion of racism seemed, at least to many, to be a misplaced, if not hostile, personal affront. The first reaction was often “*I’m not racist, and we’re not racist!*” Staff, as so many in our society in general, understood racism as being individual and intentional – and not structural and systemic. In order to move things forward, the first step was to consult with some of the country’s best minds on race and race matters, and to arrive at a common understanding of structural racism through the transformative two-and-a-half-day long “*Undoing Racism*” workshops offered by an organization known as *The People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond*. Initially, all of the executive staff and managers were required to join in these trainings in order to acquire a common language and lay the foundation for the agency’s anti-racist organizational plan.

As Mary Pender Greene has summarized,

Through the Undoing Racism workshop, we learned that structural racism refers to practices, policies, procedures, and –most important – the social culture of institutions. In a society set up to support white-skin privilege, the inherent social culture of that society’s institutions will naturally reflect bias unless there is deliberate action to counteract that bias. In institutions where there is little or no consciousness of racial bias, the social culture of unconscious racism will influence basic policies and practices. (2007; pages 10-11)

What evolved over a period of some ten years is an initiative called “**Confronting Organizational Racism**” (COR)—a multi-faceted undertaking which has had many dimensions. In this report, I summarize seven of these areas of activities:

## **I...Training and Educational Programs**

Beyond encouraging staff to join in the People's Institute's Undoing Racism workshops, the agency organized a series of its own workshops called "*Difficult Race Dialogues*," which trained managers on how to approach difficult race-based discussions. These were led by outside consultants who shared the language and principles of the People's Institute. In these workshops, managers practiced race dialogues, learning new techniques for entering and sustaining meaningful, honest, and productive exchanges. The agency also designed a Leadership Development Institute to strengthen the leadership and management capacity of the agency in general, but with the guidance of Sola Winley, President of ProvVision Consulting, it succeeded in integrating anti-racism awareness and focus into critical elements of managerial life.

An example of the many lessons explored and integrated through scores of educational programs has to do with what has been called "**Human Relationship Waste**." Mahdi Fard (2001) has described this phenomenon, wherein an individual in an organization has unused and misused human resources, and operates at only partial potential, thus excluding the perspectives and visions of all staff. Racism, obliterating uniqueness and nullifying experiences, offers a painful and compelling example of this, as managers in agencies may well, consciously or not, expect staff (and applicants or positions) to think, speak, and behave as if there were white. Managers need to uncover white-centric bias and identify changes needed to make the culture more inclusive.

## **II. The Saul Z. Cohen and Pauline Falk Chairs**

JBFCs has always taken the ongoing education of its staff very seriously, and as part of this commitment,

established the **Saul Z. Cohen Chair in Child and Family Mental Health** in 1996, to enable visiting scholars with expertise in areas of current concern to teach and train professionals at all levels. This Chair, unique in the world of social service agencies, has significantly furthered the COR initiative by drawing on the scholarship and leadership of the exceptional individuals appointed to the Cohen Chair:

2003-2005: Anderson J. Franklin, PhD and Nancy Boyd Franklin, PhD

Dr. Anderson J. Franklin is Professor and Hon. David Nelson Professional Chair in the Department of Counseling, Developmental, and Educational Psychology at Boston College, and an expert in the psychological well-being, resilience, and health of African Americans, and the impact of stereotypes and invisibility upon African American males and females.

Dr. Nancy Boyd Franklin is Distinguished Professor at the Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology of Rutgers University, known internationally for her scholarship in the area of community psychology and the treatment of ethnic minority youth and their families. She has written on extended family issues, spirituality and religion, home-based family therapy, and group therapy for Black women.

2005-2009: Kenneth V. Hardy, PhD

Dr. Kenneth V. Hardy, Professor in the Couple and Family Therapy Department of Drexel University's College of Nursing and Health Professions, is a renowned expert on racial identity issues in family therapy and Black male development, who has specialized in working with

traumatized and oppressed populations.

2010-Present: Howard Stevenson, PhD

Dr. Howard Stevenson, an Associate Professor and former Chair of the Applied Psychology and Human Development Division at the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania, whose areas of expertise include African-American psychology, the effects of at-risk neighborhoods on youth, family and parental engagement, and racial/ethnic socialization and negotiation.

JBFCFS also organized and sustained the **Pauline Falk Chair in Community Education and Research**. From 2006-2008, the Falk Chair was occupied by David Billings, D.Min., an expert on the effects of racism, oppression, violence, and white privilege.

These brilliant, experienced, and insightful educators participated in the agency's life in several ways, including:

- Leading "Interdivisionals," which are agency-wide half-day trainings of hundreds of staff;
- In-depth consultations with particular sites around specific issues of Race and Racism;
- Offering tailored trainings to specific JBFCFS programs, to enhance their understanding of, and their effectiveness in addressing, issues related to Race and Racism.

An example of the numerous subjects that have been explored in depth with these scholars are Dr. Hardy's "Tasks of Participants in Discussions about Race and Other Aspects of Social Identity," in which he articulates "**Tasks of the Privileged**" and "**Tasks of the Subjugated**" (See *Appendix A*.)

Another important theme that has been explored are "**Micro-aggressions**." Micro-aggressions have been defined as "offensive mechanisms or actions by a person that are designed to keep other individuals in an inferior, dependent or helpless role. They are verbal and kinetic, and well suited to control space, time, energy, and mobility of an individual (usually non-white or female) while producing feelings of degradation." (*American Psychiatric Glossary, 2003*.) These acts are automatic and generally unintentional, and stem from unconscious attitudes of racial superiority. (Examples might include assuming that an unfamiliar black individual in the lobby is a client rather than a mental health professional). People of color may well experience multiple micro-aggressions a day, if not an hour, and the accumulation over time burdens the targets significantly. Unaddressed, these assaults can severely limit the worker's and the agency's potential and ability to provide quality services. As Dr. Richard G. Dudley Jr. describes (1988), invalidated insults will eventually destroy the worker's self-esteem and sense of efficacy and competency, draining the personal time and energy of workers of color, and leading to burnout and the complications of stress.

### **III...Racial Affinity Groups**

Beginning in 2005, three Racial Affinity Groups organized within the agency --a "Men of Color" group, a "Women of Color" group, and a "White Allies" group. These groups met at agency headquarters in midtown Manhattan, and were agency wide, not borough or region specific. Since the end of 2008, at the Executive Director's direction, the groups have been meeting monthly in each borough, and currently, in early 2013, there are several People of Color Caucuses (no longer gender-specific), White Anti-Racist Caucuses, Joint Caucuses, and an Administrators of Color Caucus. These Racial Affinity Groups are open to all levels of staff,

allowing people to self-select, as interested, and to participate in any borough that is convenient for them.

In 2008-9, leaders of the White AntiRacist Caucus circulated a sheet labeled “White AntiRacist Caucus: Who Are We and What Do We Do?” which is appended below (See *Appendix B*).

#### **IV. “Cross-Racial Dialogues”**

Another very powerful, thought-provoking, and challenging component of the COR Initiative has been the Cross Racial Dialogues (CRDs), in which staff have the opportunity to hear the profoundly different experiences, day by day, that staff of color and white staff have. Attending to each other’s words and bearing witness to each other in these contexts has led to greater awareness, deeper understanding and effective dialogue after and between each event. Here is a terribly brief summary of these CRDs:

- The first was in February 2010, with Dr. Kenneth V. Hardy and Dr. David Billings, who occupied, respectively, the Saul Z. Cohen Chair in Child and Family Mental Health and the Pauline Falk Chair in Community Education and Research (*see above*). Drs. Hardy and Billings brought their personal and professional expertise on racial identity issues, and the effects of racism, oppression, and white privilege to this first Cross-Racial Dialogue.
  - Our second event was in July 2010. Joan Adams, a highly-regarded, long-time JBFCS social worker, facilitated a demonstration group with JBFCS staff and then cross racial teams co-facilitated break-out groups for staff to explore in more depth the thinking and feeling that they were experiencing, which helped to create a space where these issues could be openly discussed amongst staff with a range of perspectives.
  - The third event was in February 2011, with Dr. Joy DeGruy and Dr. David Billings. Dr. DeGruy, Professor of Social Work at Portland State University, presented her theory of *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome* that addressed the continuing impact of American slavery on Black people in the United States. She and Dr. Billings focused, in particular, on the impact of Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome on current interactions between people of African descent and White people. They led a discussion with the audience about experiences, questions/challenges, and next steps in the work setting.
  - The fourth event was in April 2011, when Maria Reinat Pumarejo presented on “*The Impact of the Culture of Imposition on Latinos and Latino Clients.*” Given that many conversations about race focus on a black/white dichotomy, Maria created a space to validate the experiences of race that Latinos have in this country and support the process of Latinos finding themselves a place in the work for anti-racist transformation.
  - The fifth event was in May 2012, with Jeff Hitchcock and Bonnie Cushing, two white anti-racist organizers who are part of the *Center for the Study of White American Culture* in New Jersey. The focus was on the “Role of White People in Confronting Organizational Racism” and we organized a structured dialogue in small groups for staff to explore the question of why we work for racial justice and what we can do that will be meaningful.
- Knowing that everyone who is interested cannot attend every Cross Racial Dialogue due to work obligations, the events have been video-recorded for screening and discussion throughout the boroughs, enabling more staff to hear our experts and to explore/express their own responses and experiences, in various agency sites around greater New York City.

## **V. The Anti-Racism and Multicultural Consultation and Training Service**

In 2006-2007, JBFCS formally established *The Anti-Racism and Multicultural Consultation and Training Service*, under the leadership of Joan Adams, LCSW, building on work that had been offered in recent years to both programs within our agency as well as to other communal organizations. The JBFCS Anti-Racism and Multicultural Consultation and Training Service aims to:

- \* improve the effectiveness of social services to people from all backgrounds;
- \* deepen the understanding of how race, culture, immigration and systemic racism impact clients, students, staff, faculty, managers and trustees; and
- \* improve the work environment for staff from all backgrounds, particularly people of color.

The Service's team includes clinicians, supervisors, program and executive managers, and visiting scholars. They work with direct service, supervisory, management and/or executive staff in several ways:

- Providing staff cultural competency training required to meet regulatory mandates;
- Helping supervisors and line staff learn how to have conversations about race, cultural, and structural racism, and how to integrate these conversations into practice with clients, through interactive and experiential learning;
- Collaborating with key stakeholders to revise service and hiring protocols and make policies and practices more responsive to clients and staff of all backgrounds;
- Helping organizations assess their progress in becoming an anti-racist, inclusive concern;
- Consulting with, and supporting, executive teams striving to confront organizational racism;
- Providing keynote addresses and large-group presentations to conferences.

## **VI. Holiday Celebrations and Commemorations**

Remarkably, as the JBFCS COR initiative has grown and changed, leadership has incorporated opportunities for celebration and commemoration. Just to describe two such occasions:

- On Saturday night, January 31, 2009, the Racial Affinity Groups held a celebration called "*Celebrate Change and Unity*" in the historic Alhambra Grand Ballroom on Adam Clayton Powell Blvd in Harlem, New York City. From 7:00 pm to 12:00 am, staff and friends joined in honoring four of the agency's Chairs who had contributed so much to educating, guiding and inspiring the COR work – Dr. David Billings DMin.; Dr. Anderson J. Franklin, PhD; Dr. Nancy Boyd-Franklin, PhD, and Dr. Ken Hardy PhD. Brief and inspiring words were interspersed with wonderful food, music, and dancing.
- Before Passover 2011, a moving pre-Passover program called "*From Oppression to Freedom*" was held at JBFCS Headquarters, with several staff members – African American, Latina, and White -- each speaking of their own personal ongoing journey of encountering and overcoming oppression. These moving testimonies were followed by a celebratory model of the Passover Feast of Freedom, the *seder*.

## **VII. Action Initiatives**

An important dimension of the COR Initiative that is in its early stages of development are **Action Initiatives**. Thus, for example, **Voter Registration**: As a non-profit agency receiving government funding, JBFCS cannot enter partisan politics and support particular candidates

running for office, but it is certainly within the agency's mandate and policies to encourage voter registration, empowering staff, clients, and other community members are to exercise their democratic rights. The COR Initiative helped agency offices obtain voter registration materials in the weeks and months prior to the elections of November 2012, translating our commitment to equality and justice from inspired principle to actual deed. Currently, educational programs are being held concerning the New York Police Department's "Stop & Frisk" practices, exploring racial profiling, illegal stops, and privacy rights; this may well lead to action initiatives as well.

### **On COR Successes and Achievements: The Quantitative and the Qualitative**

People within and from outside JBFCS are justifiably interested in the concrete, measurable achievements of the COR initiative, and there have, indeed, been some significant ones to note. For example, after serious inquiry and exploration, a policy was set in place that makes it mandatory for JBFCS program directors to interview at least one person of color for any supervisory position/title, or higher. At least one candidate must meet the ethnic background of the greater population that the particular program serves. Importantly, the hiring/managing director is responsible for keeping a log of applicants and providing it to the agency's Department of Human Resources once a selection has been made, furthering a tracking system of accountability.

Similarly, procedures for publicizing available social work supervisory positions in the agency have been put into place, so that the pool of applicants can be expanded. This has already led to an increase in the number of people of color appointed as supervisors in the agency's programs. As compelling as these and similar examples are, they may not be as significant as the discussions that have become a part of agency life at so many levels and in so many different forums. Whereas once white and black colleagues could not explore the racial dimensions of social problems and service provision, that exploration is now more and more common, and more and more productive. The legacy of both American and global racism informs assessment and treatment planning, and is no longer the invisible, ignored, or invalidated 'elephant in the room.' Employees have been encouraged to learn more about self-identifying -- what it means to be a person of color or a white person -- and to identify as such with clarity and deepening understanding. From students to senior staff, residential staff to clinic social workers, art therapists to administrators and psychiatrists -- all are engaging in a challenging look at what historic racism has yielded, socially and organizationally. Without this sustained inquiry and exchange, any concrete accomplishments could easily be undone, as the sensibilities of both privilege and subjugation run so very deep. The commitment to continue and develop true dialogue means that we are not giving up on ourselves or each other.

### **In Conclusion**

While not by design, or on the surface, an "interfaith project," the COR initiative of JBFCS has not only brought together people of many faiths in meaningful common cause, but highlighted critical moral and social justice --and thus, profoundly religious -- concerns. It has furthered a sense of close human kinship, while not obscuring differences, and underscored the need to view the whole person as such -- incorporating, for example, religious and spiritual dimensions with the biological, psychological, and social facets. It has deepened the meaning of the word "Jewish" in the agency's name, reflecting the traditions of Justice and Compassion in Judaism --

and testified to the wisdom of bringing faiths together to work on shared and stubborn, seemingly ineradicable social challenges. The work towards becoming a truly anti-racist organization has been affirmed as a journey, not a destination, an ongoing project of what is known in Hebrew as *Tikkun Olam*, “Repairing the World,” in partnership with each other and with the Almighty, one day at a time.

### Appendix A

#### **Dr. Kenneth V. Hardy’s**

#### **Tasks of Participants in Discussions about Race and Other Aspects of Social Identity**

##### **GENERIC TASKS:**

1. To be the expert in your own experience, not of others.
2. To create space for the telling of one’s story.
3. To make space for both thoughts and feelings.

##### **TASKS OF THE PRIVILEGED:**

1. To resist false notions of equality. It is not helpful to equate suffering.
2. Intentions vs. consequences: to understand that intentions may be good, but that doesn’t change the fact that consequences may be bad. It is not helpful to just clarify intentions when consequences were hurtful. Acknowledge the effect of consequences of your actions. Intentions are the province of the privileged; consequences are the provinces of the subjugated.
3. To challenge the ahistorical approach. History does matter, the past does effect the present. The privileged cannot understand the subjugated “out of context.”
4. To develop thick skin. Need to be able to thicken one’s skin, to not give up on connections with people who have been subjugated even if you are initially rebuffed, to continue to go back and back, to continue to try.
5. To not become a FOE – framer of other’s experiences.

##### **TASKS OF THE SUBJUGATED:**

1. To overcome learned voicelessness; to advocate for oneself. One needs to challenge the belief that it is not worth speaking up. The subjugated have often been taught that “silence is golden” and “don’t speak unless spoken to;” the challenge is to unlearn this behavior.
2. To learn to exhale the negative messages that have become internalized.
3. To overcome the addiction to protect, educate, or change the privileged.
4. To deal with one’s own rage, to channel it appropriately, not to eradicate it. Shame is a major stumbling block for the privileged; rage is a major stumbling block for the subjugated.

*NOTE: This list was presented and discussed by Kenneth V. Hardy, PhD, clinical psychologist and family therapist, during his tenure in the JBFCS Saul Z. Cohen Chair in Child and Family Mental Health at Jewish Board of Family and Children’s Services, 2005-2008.*

**Appendix B:**

**WHITE ANTIRACIST CAUCUS:  
WHO ARE WE AND WHAT DO WE DO?**

(2008)

We are a group of white staff members of JBFCS who have been coming together for approximately four years with the sanction of executive management as one of two racial affinity groups: The People of Color Caucus and the White AntiRacist Caucus.

Our primary activities have included:

- 1.) Facilitating dialogues about race at various sites around the agency
  - Program directors sometimes request consultation from the affinity groups to facilitate discussions of race to look at how it impacts clients and staff
- 2.) Providing venues for white staff to explore how they can become more effective at Confronting Organizational Racism in their individual work in the context of the agency's work
- 3.) Promoting anti-racist clinical practice
  - Integrating the meaning of racial identity and the impact of racism on clients into assessment intervention, and case discussions
- 4.) Collaborating with the other racial affinity groups in joint efforts to Confront Organizational Racism
- 5.) Developing an understanding of our own racial identity development and gaining an appreciation of how white privilege manifests in our interpersonal interactions in the workplace.

**IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING IN A REGIONAL WHITE ANTIRACIST CAUCUS GROUP, PLEASE CONTACT...**

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The author is deeply indebted to:

Mary Pender Greene, "Beyond Diversity and Multiculturalism: Towards the Development of Anti-Racist Institutions and Leaders," in the *Journal for Non-Profit Management*, 2007

Mary Pender Greene and Alan Siskind, "Foreword: From a Multicultural Institution to an Antiracist Institution: A Traditional Jewish Organization Meets the Challenge, in Blitz L.V. and Pender Greene, M (eds.), *Racism and Racial Identity: Reflections on Urban Practice in Mental Health and Social Services*, (New York: Haworth Press, 2006 (published simultaneously as *Journal of Emotional Abuse*, vol. 6, Nos. 2/3, 2006)

R. G. Dudley "Blacks in policy-making positions" Reprinted from Coner-Edwards A.F. & Spurlock J (eds.) *Black Families in Crisis: The Middle Class* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1988).

Mahdi Fard, *The Art of Life Recycling: Thirteen Secrets to a Spiritual Culture* (New Orleans: LifeRecycling Publishing, 2001)

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