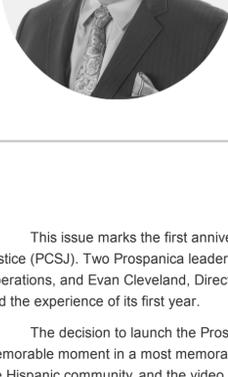


PCSJ Mission

The chief cultural mission of the Center is to improve our ability to have critical conversations about social justice issues as a diverse and multi-faceted community. We want to encourage civil discourse and make it easier and more available.



Thomas Savino
Prospanica CEO
Founder of the Prospanica Center for Social Justice

Reflections

This issue marks the first anniversary of the creation of the Prospanica Center for Social Justice (PCSJ). Two Prospanica leaders—Monica Puente, Vice President of Finance and Operations, and Evan Cleveland, Director of Programming and the PCSJ—and I reflect on its start and the experience of its first year.

The decision to launch the Prospanica Center for Social Justice occurred at a most memorable moment in a most memorable year. The pandemic, with its especially harsh impact on the Hispanic community, and the video of George Floyd's murder, with the resultant protests and riots, were immediate catalysts for its creation.

Longer-term catalysts were impatience with the slow progress of Hispanics to leadership positions, a sea change in corporate approach to diversity and social justice, and a new generation's expectations of the immediacy of progress on these issues.

The primary intention was to bring social justice into the DNA of Prospanica. Social justice issues impact the topics our organization is already highly skilled at, education, professional development, and networking. Not too long ago, Hispanic professionals had to keep the bulk of our culture out of the workplace, and, for many, out of the suburban communities, we now live. In many instances today, organizations ask you to bring your whole self to work. To be successful, Prospanica professionals must now have the ability to have social justice conversations, in a professional manner, in all parts of their lives.

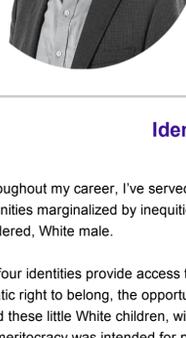
In a recent email to her student body, Dr. Judith Olian, President of Quinnipiac University, stated exactly an important value of the PCSJ: "Reasoned, academic and rigorous debate requires us to hear viewpoints with which we may disagree. However, those disagreements must not question the worth, dignity, legitimacy and/or equality of our fellow community members."

Another key value is the care we take in valuing pronouncements, statements, and slogans. They have their place, but we believe deeper conversations and actions are needed for change. That requires a much greater effort. In this undertaking, we are thankful for the guidance and work of our Advisory Board and Thought Leadership Committee.

I am excited as we continue to develop the PCSJ! Look for the release of a PCSJ platform that will enable dialog, host important professional development and listening events, and enable our members to share what they are thinking, feeling, learning, and doing.

In this issue, Monica shares her journey in search of her Hispanic identity and the impact the National Team's reading of *How to Be an Antiracist* by Dr. Ibram X. Kendi has had for her. Evan describes his recognition of his privileges and how that motivates him in his work in the PCSJ.

We will continue the introspection by inviting Prospanica members to take part in a virtual conversation on social justice. It will be held on **Tuesday, July 13, at noon Central**, and we will provide more details on how to join soon.



Evan Cleveland
Director, Programs & The Prospanica Center for Social Justice

Identity & Conversation

Throughout my career, I've served in nonprofits that strive to close the opportunity gap for communities marginalized by inequities. I've never been marginalized; I am a straight, cisgendered, White male.

These four identities provide access to power. They breed the presumption of innocence, the automatic right to belong, the opportunity for second chances. As Ta-Nehisi Coates writes, "No one told these little White children, with their tricycles, to be twice as good." The national concept of our meritocracy was intended for people who look like me.

One year ago, we created the Prospanica Center for Social Justice to improve our abilities to have critical conversations on issues of social justice. The conversation is exploration, an exchange of listening and sharing. As a team and as individuals, we've engaged in that process.

To varying degrees, depending on the organization, that exploration has been ingrained in my career. Now, though, it's delineated within my role. The exploration of where and why inequity exists can no longer be just another element in the professional atmosphere, and this past year, I've explored with greater intentionality not only the societal outlook but my own.

The police have always called me "sir," even when I was young enough to be the officer's brash teenage son. I can go for a jog anywhere, at any time. No one ever followed me through a store or followed me home from the assumption I was a threat. Building entrances, computer screens, and visual communication are all designed for my body. I was married, and no one questioned the right to that marriage; no one refused to bake our wedding cake. I've never had to explain any difference between my gender identity and the one assigned at birth. No one's mocked my accent or assumed less of my intelligence for it. At work, I've been treated like I belonged in every meeting I've attended, and my voice is heard. My name never caused my resume's rejection; only my resume did that. I've never been told my hair or clothes were unprofessional. Professional culture itself made sense to me because it reflected the interactions I'd had with adults since childhood, nearly all of them White.

Inequity isn't my lived experience. One responsibility I have is to turn that exploration inside. I must pay attention to the inner responses and the racist or sexist or otherwise false ideas I've internalized. Inside, I can witness my own ugly response to difference. That reaction may rise, and I can see it and push it away—ignoring it so that it continues to live—or I can sit with it out of curiosity. I can examine it, question its origin, and deprive it of power. I can remind myself, as Dr. Ibram Kendi writes, not to conceptualize "the real American world as White" but "to recognize there is no such thing as the 'real world,' only real worlds, multiple worldviews."

This is why the PCSJ is part of Prospanica. Our organization itself exists to impact inequity in corporate leadership, but with this initiative, we can further that interior work and expand it into the exterior dialogues that will help us see our country as it is and set it on the path toward how it can be.

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. Between the World and Me. New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015.

Kendi, Ibram X. How to Be an Antiracist. New York: One World, 2019.



Monica Puente
Vice President of Finance & Operations

Cultural-Crossfires: What Does it Take to Be Hispanic

I grew up in a community that was majority-White, and I didn't realize I was Hispanic until I was 11 years old and someone told me I wasn't. When our team at Prospanica announced we were starting a book club and would begin with Dr. Ibram Kendi's *How to Be An Antiracist*, I was skeptical that I would enjoy the book club experience. I'm open to new professional experiences and was excited to try something new, but what would I learn?

I've participated in many trainings to educate myself on non-profit management and leadership, but my newest endeavor wouldn't be about operations but self-reflection and enlightenment. Prospanica had just dived into the uncharted territory of social justice with the creation of the Prospanica Center for Social Justice. Though the word "social" has always been part of our mission statement, it's not often a topic of choice. I never imagined that my participation in the book club would leave me with an overwhelming sense of duty to make a positive change. This was new ground for me, but as usual, I was eager and ready.

The book woke me. My 20-year-old daughter explained what "woke" meant when she recognized my new sensitivity to the everyday inequities around us. I've always recognized racism, but now I saw the bigger picture of injustices everywhere. I recognized the lack of resources in our low-income Hispanic and Black neighborhoods in Dallas. I noticed the excess of pawn shops, payday lenders, and beer stores. I learned some of these communities were also food deserts, with no access to a grocery store for miles. I drove through one and was shocked by the disparity. How can someone thrive in a neighborhood like this? I continued to imbed myself into the root problems of marginalized groups and quickly aligned with Kendi's approach that racist ideas create racist policy and racist power. Kendi wrote, "We are particularly poor at seeing the policies lurking behind the struggles of people." This line was simply put but extremely impactful in how I began looking at everything in a different light and recognizing the systemic racism in daily life.

I also have my own story. When I was 11, the girls that bullied me through those pre-teen years were all Hispanic. The first racist term used against me was "bolilla", which is a slang term used to describe a person who is brown on the outside but white on the inside. I didn't know what bolillo meant, and Google did not exist at the time. They also called me a "coconut," which is what I had my "ah-ha" moment.

I struggled to fit in as the only Hispanic cheerleader in an all-white squad, and my newfound enemies would ensure that everyone knew it. To make matters worse, I didn't speak Spanish, which led to more digs. This experience opened my then naive mind to see how people could cast judgment, assumptions, and hate so quickly, without even knowing the other person or giving them a chance. I struggled and tried very hard to be more "Hispanic" in high school. I wanted these girls to notice I was now Hispanic. It worked, but not without sacrifice. I gave up cheerleading, got into a few fights, suffered academically, and adopted a new attitude to live *Mi Vida Loca*. Those that graduated high school in the late '90s may remember this movie.

I straightened up my junior year in high school and decided to be myself, whatever that was. I was tired and completely over people's expectations of how Hispanic or how White I was. I wanted people to see me for me, not what race I acted like. Kendi wrote, "To be antiracist is to deracialize behavior, to remove the tattooed stereotype from every racialized body. Behavior is something humans do, not races do." I had a wow moment when I read that; it was a confirmation to my 17-year-old self. I could not eloquently explain it back then, but that was exactly how I felt. My experience molded me into becoming someone that does not judge someone based on their appearance but for who they are as a human. My personal experience and reading Kendi's book put a fire in me to push others more, especially the younger generations, to stand out, be different, be you. Why not?

I am grateful I had the opportunity to learn, share, and participate in this book club with my colleagues. I learned so much about myself and how my experiences shape me. More importantly, I feel equipped to have deeper discussions and to support the work of systemic change.

Kendi, Ibram X. How to Be an Antiracist. New York: One World, 2019.

The PCSJ Advisory Board Members



Thomas Savino
Prospanica CEO & Founder of the Prospanica Center for Social Justice



Dr. Laura Quiros
Associate Professor of Social Work & Trauma-Informed DEI Consultant



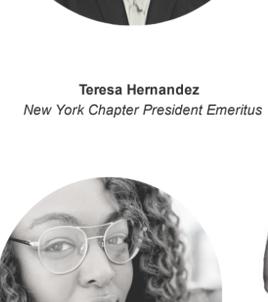
Dr. Damyn Kelly
President & CEO, Lutheran Social Services of New York



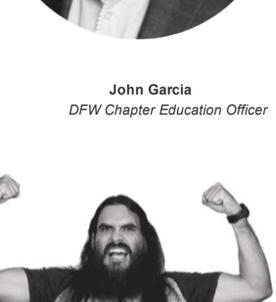
Richard Lopez
Director, Global Diversity and Inclusion at Dell

Meet the Thought Leadership Committee (TLC)

The Prospanica Center for Social Justice (PCSJ) Thought Leadership Committee (TLC) members serve as contributors to current events and social justice matters that impact our organization and communities.



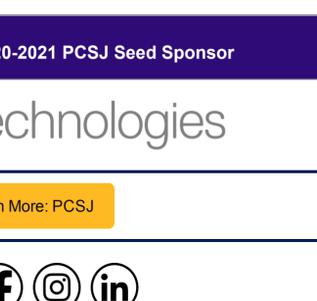
Teresa Hernandez
New York Chapter President Emeritus



John Garcia
DFW Chapter Education Officer

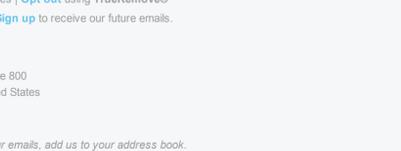


Laura Arroyo
DC Chapter Education Officer

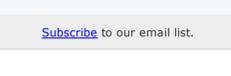


Drew Castillo
Austin Chapter Compliance Officer & Secretary

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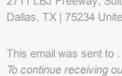


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