Decentering White Dominant Culture

AUGUST M. BALL
www.creamcityconservation.org
august@creamcityconservation.org
414.322.8482
Objectives

• Develop a shared language around white supremacy culture, its attributes, and when these attributes become harmful.

• Define and interrogate how, when and why the attributes of white supremacy culture show up in your organization.

• Begin strategizing around ways to decenter and disrupt white supremacy culture.
AGENDA

What is White Supremacy Culture

Examining White Supremacy Culture

Decentering White Supremacy Culture

Closing Reflections
What is White Supremacy
What is White Supremacy?
White supremacy or dominant culture is the idea (ideology) that white people and the ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions of white people are superior to People of Color and their ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions.
WHAT IS CULTURE

A culture is a way of life of a group of people--the behaviors, beliefs, values, and symbols that they accept, generally without thinking about them, and that are passed along by communication and imitation from one generation to the next.

Culture is a collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another.
The explicit to subtle ways that the norms, preferences, and fears of white European descended people overwhelmingly shape how we organize our work and institutions, see ourselves and others, interact with one another and with time, and make decisions.
White supremacy culture is reproduced by all the institutions of our society.

In particular

- the **media**
- the **education system**
- **western science** (which played a major role in reinforcing the idea of race as a biological truth with the white race as the "ideal" top of the hierarchy),
- and the **Christian church** have played central roles in reproducing the idea of white supremacy (i.e. that white is "normal," "better," "smarter," "holy" in contrast to Black and other People and Communities of Color.)
Papal Bulls
How The Christian Church Helped Establish
White Supremacy
Here's to the Christening of the black race.
The “blueprint for conquest”

- In 1455, Pope Nicholas V issued the Papal Bull Romanus Pontifex, authorizing the Portuguese king to “capture, vanquish” and subdue... “enemies of Christ” and to “reduce their persons to perpetual slavery”

- This was the first of the Papal Bulls of discovery, orders by the infallible Pope to enslave, spoliolate and subjugate because non-Christians were “heathen”.
Like racism, white supremacy culture can be assessed on 4 levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Systemic</td>
<td>These norms are replicated across organizations to reinforce white culture as the “right” culture.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Institutional</td>
<td>Preference for white supremacy culture are embedded into organizational policies and practices (i.e. recruitment, hiring/promotion/performance management decisions, etc)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
<td>Preference/bias toward individuals who uphold and/or are well versed in white supremacy culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>Internalized</td>
<td>Personal conscious or unconscious acceptance of white culture as right culture</td>
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White Supremacy Veiled as Professionalism

https://ssir.org/articles/entry/the_bias_of_professionalism_standards#
White Supremacy Veiled as Professionalism

The C.R.O.W.N. Act states that the standards of professional dress and grooming in workplaces and schools are often based on Eurocentric standards.

https://ssir.org/articles/entry/the_bias_of_professionalism_standards#
How Culture is Created

Typically

Work guided by dominant group's culture

Our Goal

Work guided by shared values and goals
When we allow white supremacy culture to go unchecked, we all participate in upholding racism — internally, interpersonally, institutionally and systemically.
What is white supremacy?

Share your reflections from Robin DiAngelo’s “No, I Won’t Stop Saying White Supremacy.”

• What were your biggest takeaways or “a-ha” moments from the reading?
• How does Robin DiAngelo’s Definition of white supremacy sit with you? What does it make you think and feel, given your own racial identity?
• What does it make you consider about your own Internalized Racial Oppression or Internalized Racial Superiority?
Charles Mills describes white supremacy as “...the unnamed political system that has made the modern world what it is today.”

He notes that white supremacy has shaped Western political thought for hundreds of years, it is rarely named. In this way, white supremacy is rendered invisible while other political systems – socialism, capitalism, fascism – are identified and studied. In fact, much of its power is drawn from its invisibility – the taken-for-granted aspects of white superiority that underwrite all other political and social contracts.

White resistance to the term white supremacy prevents us from examining this system. If we can’t identify it, we can’t interrupt it.”
Attributes of White Supremacy Culture

- Perfectionism
- Sense of Urgency
- Quantity over Quality
- Worship of the Written word
- Only One Right Way
- Paternalism
- Either/Or Thinking

- Power Hoarding
- Fear of Open Conflict
- Individualism
- “I’m The Only One”
- Progress is Bigger, More
- Objectivity
- Right to Comfort

The characteristics of white supremacy culture are damaging because they are used as norms and standards without being pro-actively named or chosen by the group and because they promote white supremacy thinking and behavior.
When we assess culture, we are striving to:

- Become more attentive to when white supremacy culture is being treated as the “right” culture.
- Increase consciousness around assumptions we make about what is “normal”
- Create a more inclusive culture, allowing all individuals to feel empowered to operate in self-determined and authentic ways.

![Diagram showing different groups connected to dominant group](image)

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EXAMPLE

Pivot from...

POWER HOARDING

• Decisions are top down
• Ideals from “below” are not valued
• Decision-making processes are kept confidential; a select number of Senior level staff members have insight into how decisions are made

To...

POWER SHARING

• Ideals at all levels are valued for the expertise they represent.
• Ideas from a diverse set of staff members are requested; space is made for them to be heard.
• Budgets and org-wide decisions are made available for viewing and providing input on.
Making Pivots

• How are attributes of white supremacy culture **currently centered** in your work?

• What **pivots** can you make to decenter white supremacy culture and try something different?

• What **challenges** do you anticipate encountering as you work to decenter white supremacy culture? How can you **mitigate** these challenges?
REFLECTION & PRACTICE

• Review the “Mapping Our Proximity to White Dominant Culture” with your work team.

• Copy the document to your own drive and rename it.

• You may use the document as a tool for reflection or actively fill it out together with your entire organization.
As with other change efforts, racial equity work requires people to personalize the process in order to find their own entry points into work, and as each of us reflects on our own identity and what it means in both an individual and organizational context, frictions can arise. If not tactfully managed, issues of intersectionality, power dynamics, personal and work-related boundaries, and unconscious biases can become barriers that stand in the way of progress.

Yaro Fong-Olivares
THANK YOU!

August M. Ball

www.creamcityconservation.org

august@creamcityconservation.org