

# WHITE PRIVILEGE: WHAT'S A FAMILY THERAPIST TO DO?

Gene Combs (2019)

## **Abstract**

Privilege is the freedom to ignore things that other people are forced to confront; dramatic things like being gunned down by a vigilante on the way home from a convenience store or less urban and visible things like having to live on secluded parcels of land that no one else wants. Most family therapists enjoy the freedom not to experience such events. Many of the people who come to us for help don't have that freedom. My intent here is to increase felt awareness of the injustice of institutional racism and to suggest some actions that White family therapists can take to bring forth a more just society in terms of education, housing, access to wealth, and basic safety.

- Get uncomfortable. Confront our own racism, and find responsible ways to deal with our fragility in facing it.
- Acknowledge ourselves as racial beings with particular and limited perspectives on race.
- Support meaningful policies toward structural and financial reparations for the continuing effects of slavery, genocide, land theft, Jim Crow, and structural racism. Examples of reparations include some form of formal recognition of the history of injustice and a genuine restitution of equality in education, voting rights, and the ability to build wealth.
- Educate ourselves instead of depending on people of color to do it for us.
  - Learn the basics of black history, and the histories and circumstances of indigenous people, and of immigrants who have come seeking refuge but found little opportunity.
  - Read some classic works of black, native American, Latino, Asian and other literatures.
- Use our privilege: speak up, speak out, influence those with whom we have influence.
  - Go to protests.
  - Hold our public officials accountable for ending racial profiling, stop-and-frisk policies, police brutality, and the murder of people of color.
  - Work to elect people who understand institutional racism and are dedicated to undoing it, and oppose elected officials with racist beliefs and practices.
- Give money to an anti-racist cause.
- Do pro-bono clinical work for people who can't find affordable care.
- Seek out marginalized voices and perspectives; listen—closely, carefully, often—to people of color and learn from them.
- Connect with other white people to hold each other accountable to people of color for the effects of our actions (or lack of action) on their lives.
- Expand our knowledge of how racism intersects with other issues such as class and gender, but take care not use those other issues as distractions from race
- Work to make the organizations we participate in more inclusive, with more people of color in leadership positions.
- Attend and/or sponsor trainings on structural racism, whiteness, and other forms of injustice.
- Pay attention to previously-unexamined racism in the words we use and the stories we tell.
- Be peacefully intolerant of intolerance.
- Join a multi-cultural community organization.
- Remember that “race” constructs a spectrum of possible identities. Don't treat it as a binary.