

# Decentering Whiteness

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2015 Edition

by Jeff Hitchcock and Charley Flint

## F O R E W O R D

This year the Center for the Study of White American Culture (CSWAC) celebrates its 20th Anniversary. We have seen some positive changes in our country since CSWAC's founding in 1995, but much remains distressingly the same, or — in the backlash of rapidly changing demographics, widening economic inequality and our first Black President — often worse as far as racial justice is concerned. White normative culture continues to occupy the center of our society, and our nation is still plagued by racial injustice and its subsequent pathology and unrest.

In 1997, our co-founders, Dr. Charley Flint and Jeff Hitchcock, launched a series of Whiteness Papers with “Decentering Whiteness.” This inaugural paper called for nothing less than a transformation of the foundational structure of our country. The course they laid out is a hopeful and practical one. We reissue it here, complete with updates, as an offering to the growing racial justice community and in celebration of our 20 years of commitment to the creation of a society which revolves around a multiracial center, and thereby fulfills the promise of freedom and justice for all.

Much has changed, it's true — but too much has remained the same. Our work continues, and we welcome you to join us.

Bonnie Berman Cushing  
September 2015  
Montclair, NJ

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## A c k n o w l e d g e m e n t s

### **1997 Edition**

We would like to thank Doug Fettig and Pearlie Peters for their thoughtful comments on our initial draft. Appreciation also goes to historian A.D. Powell for her bibliography on mixed-race groups in the United States. Finally, as a point of inspiration, we would like to thank the emerging multiracial community for the racial change it is fostering, and the promise of safety it holds in a monoracist society.

### **2015 Edition**

Our heartfelt appreciation goes to Bonnie Berman Cushing for her critical review and editorial comments as we began this new edition. We are grateful to James Edler for his critical review and comments. Finally, we wish to express our appreciation for the wider community of anti-racist activists who sustain us in our hope and vision of a better world.

**W**hiteness in its contemporary form in United States society is culturally based. It controls institutions, which are extensions of white American culture, and which are also bounded — that is, governed — by the values and precepts of white American culture. (Katz, 1978; Terry, 1970)<sup>1</sup>

## Whiteness and the mainstream

There exists in the United States a mainstream culture that is less white than it used to be. The mainstream forms the "center" of American society. This does not mean all people adhere to that center, or that the center is truly multiracial. It is not. We contend that it is still very white, and more similar to its historical position of being nearly all-white than to some future time when the mainstream might be truly multiracial.

A quick glance at the "top" of our central, or mainstream, culture in the United States confirms it is still very white and male. Dominance by men has long characterized white society. Our Presidency, until recently, was all white and male. The United States Senate is virtually all-white and all male. Fortune 500 CEOs are virtually all-white and all male.<sup>2</sup>

The mainstream-as-white-male has long been challenged by women. In recent years some inroads have been achieved by women at all levels of our society. There are women as senators and CEOs for instance. Dominance by white men and white women has been challenged by people of color throughout American history and recent history continues to present this challenge. Access to the mainstream has been wedged open by men and women of color at nearly all levels.

## Multiple locations of dominance and oppression

The mainstream society in America is still quite white and male. In addition, mainstream society is also heterosexual, Christian, abled, and middle-class. Dominance and oppression do not come in discrete packages. Individuals may be dominant on one status and oppressed on another. It is possible to do an analysis of the intersections of all these statuses of dominance and oppression. But it is also unwieldy. Race in the lives of people in the United States remains the focus of our paper. This is not to rank one form of dominance-oppression above any other, but simply to give more detail to the area of our focus in this brief work.

## The experience of centrality

Those in the center, those who occupy a dominant status such as whiteness, experience the center not so much as a consciously acknowledged status, but rather a complex of features in their social experience that have surrounded them since inception. Centrality is experienced by insiders as:

**The standard.** Cultural values are applied to all areas of human experience, often unconsciously, but sometimes not. The white standard of feminine beauty, for instance, is to be light-skinned, thin, full-breasted, devoid of obvious body hair, and blonde with European facial features. (Katz, 1978)

**Background.** The culture itself is not a point of discussion, focus, or examination. Rather, things different from the culture become the objects of attention. White people, for instance, overwhelmingly concentrate on discussing and studying other racial groups. Whiteness and white people as a racial group are not discussed or studied. Taboos are present in white culture against bringing the discussion and study of whiteness into the foreground.<sup>3</sup> (Katz, 1978)

**Normal.** That which is expected of the average person. White people, often living in isolation from contact with people of color, view the customs and practices of white people as normal, and those of people of color as deviant. (Katz, 1978)

**The "common" understanding.** That which the average person is expected to know and accept without question. Discussion is viewed as unnecessary, complicating issues which are already and firmly resolved. White people react negatively when another white person, or a person of color, questions some "common" understandings.

**Undifferentiated.** Differences and rankings exist among white people, and various European immigrant groups have transformed themselves from "foreigners" to being white people (Ignatiev, 1995), but a white person, once that status is achieved, is assumed to be the same as any other white person with regard to whiteness.

**Distinguished from other, outsider.** Often the most conscious part of a cultural self-identity, white people spend a lot of time comparing themselves to people who are not white. Often the comparison is implicit and unspoken, with the focus being on examining "differences" in other racial groups and cultures (Terry, 1970).

**"Glue" that holds things together.** The values of the central culture are seen as interwoven and establishing order on social events. In white culture, this is

often expressed in the belief that multiculturalism will lead to conflicting and contending power centers.

**Comfort.** Beliefs and values help the individual feel good about themselves.<sup>4</sup> In white culture, this often means suppressing or reinterpreting efforts to discuss issues of dominance, conquest and exploitation of cultures of color.

**Growth.** The culture provides avenues for economic support and professional advancement. White culture makes these available to white people who have access to the culture, but not people of color.

**Familiarity.** Cultural learning takes place from birth onward, as part of one's lived experience. It is an outgrowth of day-to-day life. As such, it is very familiar, and even a little bland and commonplace to insiders. In white culture, this is expressed by people saying they "have no culture," are "bland" or "white bread."

**Obviousness.** Cultural values learned by children are not presented as if they are alternatives from which to choose, but rather simply the way things are done. The fact that "everyone" acts that way makes it seem "obvious" that is how people should act.

**The way everyone does it.** Cultures will only permit one set of values, rather than competing sets. Part of the function of culture is to let everyone interact through some shared basis of meaning and understanding. Within a culture, "everybody" does tend to do things the same way — to use the same language, celebrate the same events, etc. In white culture this is sometimes expressed as a belief that people of color must automatically know how "people" do things, i.e. how white people do things.

**Not open to contradiction.** The center of a culture tends to defend its values and to place negative sanctions upon people who question them. White culture is antagonistic to people of color who contradict its values, or who take espoused values of white culture and demonstrate that white culture has not lived up to them.

**Affirmation.** Being in the center offers a feeling of belonging, of being an OK person, and having a place in society and in the world. White culture sometimes expresses this affirmation in terms of being "American," when in fact it is affirming only white Americans.

**Morally correct.** The values of the center are seen as morally correct and those of other cultures are viewed as less morally sound. White culture frequently conveys stereotypes of cultures of color that

attempt to place these cultures on a lower moral plane than white culture.

**Not marginal.** A negative way of defining one's cultural self-definition. White people characteristically see themselves as not "black," not "people of color," and not "foreigners."

**Essentialized as dominant.** That is, not subject to commonalities that all human cultures share. Not having some measure of both good and bad characteristics. Viewed as an extreme in terms of goodness or evilness.<sup>5</sup> By some, whiteness is viewed as inherently and entirely evil, comprising only power and privilege. This view generally sees no possibility for white culture to transform itself to a less central and more enlightened form. Others view whiteness as exclusively good, unique, and deserving of its rewards. This view generally believes whiteness can transform itself, but sees no reason to do so. Any transformation is viewed as a threat.

**Ordained by God.** Clearly evident in the past, and sometimes present, practice of white Americans. The pulpit has often been used to justify whiteness.

**Access to power and resources.** Access depends on adhering to the central values of the culture, and showing a willingness to act in its defense. White culture, having defined people of color as outsiders, never fully accepts the claims of people of color to share its central values, or to defend these values faithfully.

**Secure from disruption from the margins and beyond.** No culture can tolerate continual disruption of its internal processes and hope to retain its form and structure. The central part of a culture is that part which is most defended by members of the culture. Some values may be important aspects of cultural self-definition, but other, more central, values are worth dying for. In white culture, for instance, the value of individuality is often felt by white people to be a central point of defense.

**Adopting values of others through choice or environmental necessity, not by coercion from another cultural group.** All cultures change and evolve, often under the influence of changes in the environment, and/or through contact with other cultures. White culture has operated this way vis-à-vis cultures of color, but it has not extended the same courtesy or freedom of self-directed change to cultures of color.

**A self-centeredness that says all the above features makes one "better" than marginal groups.** In white people, this is termed "racism," "prejudice," "white supremacy," and "internalized dominance." As a

general cultural process it might also be called "ethnocentrism." People in the center tend to absorb an attitude of superiority. If the center is power, and if power corrupts, this feature describes a sort of psychic corruption often shared, sometimes unconsciously and other times consciously, by people who occupy the center.

(For a summary of the foregoing features, see Chart I beginning on page 13).

People at the center might not experience all these features in their entirety. Some white people, for instance, decidedly do not feel a sense of affirmation from white society. Many white people disavow any internalized sense of white identity, in an explicit act of disaffirmation from whiteness.

People not at the center are likely to experience these features, not unconsciously but as impositions on their own cultural experience, impositions of which they are quite conscious. The central culture, given enough power, is able to project its view and make it the prevailing one in mainstream media and institutions.

Taken together, these features capture much of the experience of centrality in the United States in the 1990s.<sup>6</sup> Central cultures, or the central culture (however it may be defined) have also displayed meanness, violence and destructiveness directed toward cultures of color, and other cultural groups that occupy its margins, such as women; lesbians, gays and transgender people<sup>7</sup>; people with disabilities; non-Christians such as Jews, Moslems, and Bahai; and many others.

## Characteristics of the center

Our analysis supposes that there will be a center. The larger question of whether there must be a center at all is a wide-open query that is beyond the scope of this paper. We take the position that to pose a society without a center is to suggest something historically uncommon among large societies. Large societies, and perhaps all societies, need central points of comparison, of social and economic exchange, and of assimilation. These are the means by which a culture realizes and defines itself.

To pose a society without a racial center, when race has been central for more than 300 years, is to suggest a revolutionary change, not an evolutionary one. One problem with revolutionary change is that in the ensuing chaos, disruption and violence, the new society may be no more fair and just than the former one. In addition, there is no magic in encouraging violence and disruption. There is always the chance that revolutionary change might not take place. A misdirected "revolution" might simply re-

structure racial relationships in a different way without removing race as a structural feature of society.

The central area of a culture can vary remarkably in characteristics from one culture to another. In some cultures, the center may be diffuse, in others, concentrated. Some cultures may support a vertical center with extreme class differences and a powerful, entrenched elite. Other cultures may have a horizontal center, with few boundaries among cultural members in terms of access to resources and power. Cultures also vary in the type and number of barriers imposed upon outsiders who would like to enter the culture.

The center can also be oppressive or supportive. In the history of the United States, whiteness as the center has always, on the whole, been oppressive. This has been the net effect, despite many acts of resistance by people who have been racialized as white. The central culture has constructed numerous and real cultural barriers to entry, withholding access to resources from people of color.

In racial terms, an important advantage of being white is that only one cultural practice must be acquired by the individual, and it is acquired from birth. At the margins, those wanting access to resources do not have power, so they can not simply acquire the access they desire. People from non-white racial/cultural groups must pursue access to resources on terms set by the center, i.e. according to the cultural practices of white people.<sup>8</sup> This necessitates being bicultural. A requirement of biculturality creates considerable overhead for the individual, making their efforts inefficient because of the need to think through things that for cultural insiders are unconscious.

## Centering the margin

If whiteness, or white culture, is at the center of American society, then color and cultures of color are at the margins. Cultures of color have created and continue to maintain their own historical sets of values. These include cultural self-definitions of being different from the center.

Within the last decade there has been talk in progressive circles of "centering the margins." While the intent of this idea is worthy, its statement as a strategy raises questions. First, it hides the fact that cultures of color have their own centers, which include not only individual people, leaders or philosophies, but also shared heritage and values. The characteristics of these centers of cultures of color, to the insider person of color, may have similar features of normality, invisibility, and standard setting as does the center of white society to white people.

A person on the margin may not want to occupy the center as it is currently defined, i.e. as dominated by the values of white culture. Drawing people from the centers of their respective cultures into an otherwise unmodified and largely white center still leaves whiteness as central. Movement toward the center, after all, means adopting the values that are already in place there. These values may change as the center changes, but then that should be the object, i.e. that the center should be changed, not that the margins should be centered.<sup>9</sup>

## Relations between white culture and cultures of color

In the multiracial/cultural society of America interracial/cultural relations can be viewed from two levels. On the individual level, we can look at how any one person or persons can move within and between various racial/cultural groups. At some more aggregate level, we can look at how various racial/cultural groups have stood in relation to one another. In this latter sense we can make statements such as, "White people have exploited people of color" and understand it describes relations on a grand scale, or in the preponderance, but allowing as well that not all individuals' experiences could be condensed to so simple a statement.

On the individual level, people may move among racial cultures, not without cost, but with some greater degree of acceptance, on average, than in the past. Individual movement is still constricted by racial identity and ascribed racial status. Aggregate truths remain. White culture still presents barriers to people of color. Cultures of color erect defensive barriers to protect themselves from white culture, and to a lesser extent, other cultures of color.

Individual variation also exists in the extent that people may gravitate toward or away from the center of their own racial/cultural group. Some people identify closely with their racial/cultural group, and in some cases choose to live as much as their choice will allow within the monoracial/cultural experience of their group.<sup>10</sup> Other individuals may feel constrained by their own racial/cultural group when other racial/cultural groups are readily at hand as counter-examples. Some people prefer a multiracial/cultural lifestyle.

People may gravitate toward or away from the center of racial/cultural groups other than their own. Examples of gravitating away from racial/cultural groups are well-known. White people have held cultures of color in disdain. Various cultures of color have, defensively, held white culture in disdain

and created boundaries from other cultures of color from time to time.

In other cases, people from various cultures of color have formed alliances and mutual living arrangements, as among Native Americans and African Americans. Some white people have been attracted, individually, to various cultures of color. Whether any people of color have been attracted to white culture is not clear, but many have taken pride in their ability to understand and work its rules to their advantage.

People, within limits, can come and go in multiracial and monoracial settings, seeking their place amidst the larger monoracial/cultural structures. But it is unlikely the structures themselves will dissolve. For a period of time of historical dimension, from several years to many decades, African American culture, Native American culture, and European American culture will not effectively blend into one center. Despite the differences and conflicts within each of these racial/cultural groups concerning the location of their own centers, each likely will act to maintain its center independent of the other two.<sup>11</sup>

When Asian Americans and Hispanic Americans are included in the mix, the possible melding of these racial/cultural groups into a common center seems unlikely. Each group has very distinct circumstances. The center of each racial/cultural group may undergo radical transformation, and some may converge as others remain static or grow more distant. But to have the centers of all racial groups merge on their own accord and become a single center remains doubtful.

Cultures of color have in the past aligned jointly against white culture, and this possibility remains open and to some extent is in practice even today. But this political alignment on a common goal is not the same as these cultural groups merging or assimilating their centers. In all these scenarios, whiteness still remains central.

The continued position of white culture at the center of American society is problematic because white culture has, on balance, been based on principles of conquest and exploitation. This is not the only relationship that a center might have to the margins, but it has been the one that white culture has maintained from its seminal appearance in Jamestown to this very moment. Time has changed many things, including the nature of power relations between white culture and cultures of color. Elements of exchange and justice are beginning to make headway.

But white culture as the center has not offered protection to cultures of color. Its coercive ability alone has been sufficient to hold these cultures at the

margins by force. The center might conceivably hold onto its margins by offering exchange and justice rather than conquest and exploitation. But white culture has no aggregate experience offering protection such as this, and it is doubtful that it can learn.

## Decentering whiteness<sup>12</sup>

Whiteness needs to be taken out of the center to join other racial/cultural groups on the margins. Simply attacking whiteness is not enough to accomplish this goal. Assaults on whiteness, depending on their nature, may have the effect of confirming and solidifying the central position of whiteness in American society. Like a prize fighter who by defeating all contenders expands their reputation and retinue, whiteness may find its position reinforced while those who attack it are relegated further to the margins. Thought must be given to how whiteness itself can be made more marginal.

Given the power relationships between racial/cultural groups, it is unlikely that the center can remain vacant. Power, like nature, abhors a vacuum. We do not feel any single race should have the advantage of being defined as the center. Thus even if there must be some center to society, no single race should occupy that space in exclusion of the others.

But if each racial/cultural group has its own center, and if it seems likely these centers will not merge, then for any one race to claim the center becomes, effectively, an act of exclusion. With whiteness no longer central, however that might be accomplished, the various racial/cultural groups in America will be in a face-off over whose standards prevail. In other words, they each will have to contend for the center.

There is no problem with the different racial/cultural groups doing this, provided the contest is fair, and it continues to allow access to the center by all groups. However, contests sometimes become lop-sided, someone wins and someone loses, and destructive conflict arises as a way of solving disputes. After all, if white culture did not use its coercive power and if it competed fairly for influence, American society would be much less racially conflicted.

White culture has proven it cannot do this while being in the center. It is doubtful it can be done by any single racial/cultural group at all. However, it is possible to envision a multiracial center. Multiracial communities exist and have existed throughout the United States' history.

While there is no self-identified multiracial culture in America, there are pockets of multiracial

community development. These multiracial pockets, always local, fragile, and subject to the turbulence of relations between the monoracial/cultural groups, might nonetheless exist at the center of several racial/cultural groups that stand in check and balance with one another.

Viewed another way, it is unlikely white culture will displace itself from the center. Cultures simply do not act that way on their own volition. Cultures of color, however, are not likely to unilaterally displace whiteness for many years at the soonest. In effect, with people of color acting unilaterally, the model is more one of surrounding whiteness. This may diminish the scope of white culture, but it still leaves it at the center. It will take a multiracial effort to displace whiteness, one that includes people from all racial/cultural groups.

A multiracial center has the advantage that it can develop a cultural practice of protecting the margins, i.e. monoracial/cultural groups from whence the multiracial culture originates. The monoracial/cultural groups have the means for representation in the multiracial center from within their own groups. Thus no monoracial/cultural group needs to give up its own center in order to attain some measure of participation in the center of American society.

However, people in multiracial communities have an interesting standing vis-à-vis one another and toward their cultures of origin. By definition, they have not located themselves at the center of their own cultures of origin, and also by definition they all share this trait in common, regardless of the cultures from which they originated.

Moving whiteness out of the center, or decentering it, is a large goal that invites development of strategies and tactics in the service of making the transition. Moving a multiracial culture into the center is also a large goal, equally deserving of a transition plan. We contend that it is not good planning to approach these goals as if they can be independently accomplished. Whiteness cannot be removed without some thought of what will happen to the power vacuum its removal creates. A multiracial center will not be achieved unless whiteness is decentered.

Following the spirit of transition planning, in the next section we suggest some approaches to decentering whiteness. Some are already familiar. We include them as an overall arsenal of approaches to the decentering task. In the final section, we will discuss multiracial community building.

## Approaches for decentering whiteness

Decentering whiteness, as we envision it, is a collective process that can take place in organizations, sectors of society, personal lives, etc., over periods of days, months, years and generations. Anyone so willing can take the goal of decentering whiteness and attempt to develop transition plans that affect their local sphere of influence. Larger alliances can be sustained to exert influence on a broader scale.

Many of these efforts and alliances are already underway, though not necessarily under the name of decentering whiteness. While we feel there is a need to make the process of decentering whiteness a broadly accepted goal, these ongoing efforts, such as those stemming from multiracial/cultural education and activism, are important. We do not believe there is anything incompatible with our approach and these existing efforts. As much as anything, we are suggesting a reason for their continued and renewed use.

The following list of features of "being in the center" is the same first given at the beginning of this article. For each feature we suggest a strategy, a guideline or a goal for moving whiteness from its central position and replacing the center with multiracial values.

**The standard.** Ask what other standards exist, and from what other racial/cultural groups.

**Background.** Assume whiteness, and race, always structures our experience, and thus needs to be consciously considered as part of any social process.

**Normal.** Normal is defined by one's culture. Different racial/cultural groups have different definitions of normal. A central definition of normal should be a multiracial one and a desire for multiracial contact should be assumed to be normal.

**The "common" understanding.** Ask, "Understood by whom?" and listen to see if both white people and people of color answer. When only white people answer, the "commonness" of the understanding among all Americans becomes questionable.

**Undifferentiated.** Degrees of immersion in white culture should be articulated. Not all white people are equally immersed or involved in white culture or cultures of color. Some whites prefer monoracially white settings. Others prefer and are more knowledgeable about multiracial settings or nonwhite monoracial settings.

**Distinguished from other, outsider.** One of many racial/cultural groups, all of whom have a more or less equal standing and claim on the American experience and American society.

**"Glue" that holds things together.** There are severe problems with the "glue" experienced by non-white people. The glue (shared heritage and privilege) that holds white people together is not the same as the glue (power and coercion) that holds cultures of color to an American society that is white at the center. This glue needs to be changed to a multiracial one — one that expresses the belief that, despite the effort it requires, a social order that is characterized by cooperation, collaboration and justice is preferable.

**Comfort.** Now: Hard for white people to find with integrity. Future: White people do not have to give up their racial/cultural style or identity, just their centrality. One's culture is protected from harm by a mutual agreement among racial/cultural groups to work cooperatively and not to exploit one another.

**Growth.** Avenues for economic support and professional advancement should extend from a multiracial center. Acquisition of the customs and habits needed to function in a multiracial center should be a prerequisite for personal and professional growth. Limited growth opportunities should remain available to white people unable or unwilling to master the skills needed to function outside of white culture, but these should be modest in comparison to opportunities available in the multiracial center.

**Familiarity.** Whiteness is a cultural expression with European roots that stands alongside other cultural groups. This cultural expression has a unique character that differs from other racial/cultural groups (each of whom also have a unique character), and which may be appreciated by people from both white culture and cultures of color.

**Obviousness.** White cultural practices should be presented as one alternative among several. (Katz, 1978)

**The way everyone does it.** Distinguish between making universal statements (e.g. "The way every person does it") and statements which really are more culturally specific, (e.g. "The way every white person does it"). Do not try to use the two interchangeably.

**Not open to contradiction.** Must contend for the center and for understanding as one of many racial/cultural groups. Can be contradicted in the process, like any other group.

**Affirmation.** Available to all those who feel a connection to European American culture. Whiteness



still observes the "one drop" rule of hypodescent. This should be modified to allow any person with a cultural and/or genetic tie to European American culture to identify as white. Identification should not be posed as an either/or situation. People of mixed ancestry, or who gravitate to a mixture of cultural influences, should be able to acknowledge all these influences, including whiteness.<sup>13</sup>

**Morally correct.** Within its local context, but not above the multiracial center, and not according to any absolute biological or cultural principle.

**Not marginal.** Somewhat marginal, influencing the center but not central itself.

**Essentialized as dominant.** Understood as having had many advantages and having acted on them.

**Ordained by God.** No longer ordained by God, if ever.

**Access to power and resources.** Available from centers of racial/cultural groups, but mostly from the multicultural center.

**Secure from disruption from the margins.** Security provided by the multiracial center, and agreement among racial/cultural groups.

**Adopting values of others through choice or environmental necessity, not by coercion from another cultural group.** Continue as is, but will need to adopt multiracial values in order to participate in the center.

**A self-centeredness that says all the above features makes one "better" than marginal groups.** While hardly commendable, this is a value that can be sustained in a monoracial/cultural setting. So long as a racial/cultural group is not in the center, a value of self-centeredness will have limited impact on people from other racial/cultural groups. Nonetheless, a value of self-centeredness will hinder functioning in the multiracial center, and thus will keep those who hold this value from gaining access to resources the center controls.

(For a summary of the foregoing features, see Chart I beginning on page 13).

## Multiracial community building

Multiracial community building is in its infancy. This infancy has been quite prolonged, having extended the entire period of the European occupation of the United States. A true community of people living a multiracial lifestyle has never existed as a central feature of American society, but it has existed as a continuous feature in many local settings and throughout our national history.

A multiracial community, in the sense that we use it, is a community group in which people from two or more racial/cultural groups work and/or live together on equal terms. In the truest sense of community, the fullest expression of a multiracial community is to be found in both working and living together. In actual fact, this has been difficult to do. Historically, monoracial/cultural groups, and particularly white culture, have been antagonistic to the formation of multiracial communities.

A second characteristic of multiracial communities, besides living and working in common, is a lack of racial boundaries. Access to the community may require some shared beliefs, but those beliefs never impose skin color and racial origin as boundaries. This is the expression of an ideal, indeed one that white culture and other monoracial cultures also espouse to some degree. Whether it has ever been truly realized by any multiracial community at any time in the United States is debatable. But as an ideal, it is more likely to have been approached, to have been lived in practice as well as theory, and to have been subjected to the whims and fancies of historical and environmental stresses within those communities that have had a multiracial character.

At least three types of multiracial communities have existed, and continue to exist, in the United States. There is the interracial community, i.e. that group of people either interracially living together as partners, or who acknowledge being of interracial descent, or who have formed interracial families through adoption. The interracial community is a small but rapidly growing segment of our society. It is beginning to view itself as a community, developing its own media, and its own stances on issues.<sup>14</sup>

There are unintentional communities (from the standpoint of creating a multiracial process) in which racial boundaries have been weak enough that intermixing in work and family settings has taken place. Often this has happened among non-white groups, such as Native Americans, African Americans and Hispanic Americans. Less often it has included the presence of white people, quite probably because the boundary between white and non-white has been more effectively policed than, say, the boundary between black and non-black.<sup>15</sup>

Lastly, there are intentional communities where various racial groups, including white people, have set out to create either an organization or an actual community based on a multiracial vision. Projects such as this are underway today, as well as existing in the past.<sup>16</sup>

Multiracial community building can be done in degrees. A person living in a monoracial family can locate within a multiracial neighborhood, work for a

multiracial organization, attend a multiracial church, and generally place a premium on those settings where multiracial norms are explicitly spoken and observed. By a "premium," we mean to say a monoracial person is willing to pay more, travel further, or work harder for access to these settings than they are for access to a monoracial setting, especially the monoracial setting of their own racial group.

The condition that a multiracial community have no racial boundaries means that white people must have the opportunity for inclusion, as must any racial group. History has shown this is one privilege white culture has seldom extended to its own members. "Going native," as it were, adopting the values of a non-white culture, whether it be a multiracial one or a monoracial one, has always brought negative sanctions from white culture upon those white people who "strayed."

Multiracial communities composed entirely, or nearly entirely, of non-white racial/cultural groups have existed throughout the United States' history. These communities provide examples of multiracial living and their history must be studied along with the history of multiracial communities that included members from white culture. In isolated regions, and during occasional periods, conditions have been favorable to the emergence of these multiracial communities from their usually marginal position to a point of visibility in mainstream society. At other times, multiracial communities have been ruthlessly suppressed by white culture, with the intention being that they no longer exist as viable social entities. The history of these efforts should be recovered and highlighted.

On a contemporary basis, multiracial community building has not risen to the status where it is recognized as a collective action or activity. Nonetheless, centers of multiracial community building do exist, whether as interracial families and/or intentionally integrated communities.

We know of no general agreement on what constitutes multiracial community building. The term itself is ours. We know of no actual description of multiracial community building as an intentional process, though we believe it is likely some descriptions might exist. Nonetheless, it is possible to suggest some principles that might apply to such an effort. In our opinion, multiracial community building means:

**Having a critical mass of people from two or more racial groups.** It's obvious more than one race is needed for multiracial community building. By critical mass, we mean to say enough people of each racial/cultural group must be present so that they are able to sustain their own cultural experience within the community without having to subsume

that experience under a monoracial/cultural orientation. For example, many white neighborhoods and schools claim to be "integrated" because they have a proportionally small non-white population of perhaps 3-5%. With so few people of color, white culture will continue to be in the center, perhaps seeking to accommodate the people of color who are present. But multiracial community building will not take place unless a larger number of people from each racial group are present.

**Creating local multiracial centers of activity and living.** People interested in multiracial community building need to find centers of activity (communities, organizations, employers, etc.) where people from several racial backgrounds are working and living together. Though few and far between, these centers exist. When not present, people need to take the initiative to create them.

**Placing the multiracial community in the center of one's life.** Even among people interested in multiracial and multicultural activities, many are still committed to a monoracial lifestyle. Certainly a monoracial lifestyle is and should remain an option for people, but multiracial community building, if it is to become significant, requires people to commit themselves to the interest of this community above and beyond their monoracial interests.

**Acknowledging monoracial community centers and the connections we all have to them.** Multiracial community building need not require its participants to abandon their monoracial heritage. Even persons of multiracial heritage have ties to monoracial communities. Rather, it might be expected that people in the multiracial communities will still be supportive of efforts among monoracial communities to achieve racial equality and harmony. It must also be expected that people who are attracted to multiracial community building will take some interest in being involved with other racial/cultural groups.

**Sometimes seeing the world in monoracial vs. multiracial terms.** For people engaged in building multiracial communities, sometimes this is the only way the world will make sense. Each monoracial community may make some effort to discourage its members from shifting their alliance from a monoracial center to a multiracial one. Each person in a multiracial community is thus subject to pressure from their racial group to recognize the prominence of their monoracial ties, and disavow or place as secondary the task of building a multiracial community.

**Identifying, naming and supporting other local centers of multiracial activity and living.** Creating multiracial communities is difficult work and can

only be done on a small scale at this time in American society. But to attract greater numbers of people, to develop a larger sense of community, and to learn and benefit from the experience of existing efforts it is necessary to identify, name and support these local efforts.

**Educating without, and learning within, about what is needed to sustain a small, multiracial community.** The learning here is clearly experiential—it's in the doing. Unless and until people actually build multiracial communities, the necessary steps for creating and sustaining such communities will only be speculative. We need to draw lessons from actual projects and actual communities, from people sharing real experiences.

**Placing a claim on the central values of America.** Multiracial communities today exist on the margins of the margins. To speak the virtues of true multiracial involvement is held by many to be speaking of something odd at best, if not misguided, bizarre, or even disloyal. While many people are willing to espouse colorblindness, shared personhood, and a common humanity, the actual practitioner of multiracial community building still feels as if they have to apologize to someone for something, or find a spot so secluded that the greater and more powerful racial forces in America do not tear their efforts asunder.

Whether by seeking anonymity, or by presenting itself as socially insignificant, as a sideline, or as a harmless matter of personal preference, multiracial community building must stop apologizing for itself. We assert that multiracial community building must become the central force in the United States. Rather than anonymity, it should be highlighted. Rather than socially insignificant, it should claim the significance of being central. It should not be content to be a placid side tributary; it should claim the mainstream, the styles, the trends, the attention of the country. Not odd, but normal, the multiracial community should not have to explain itself. It should ask why monoracial communities choose to be isolated, and it should demand that they reach out. It should demand economic, social and moral support for its expansion and growth, for ultimately to remove whiteness from the center, something economically, socially and morally greater must take its place.

## NOTES

1. Our original thinking remains largely intact today as we issue this update. Consequently, we have retained nearly all the original article as it was published in 1997. Some small changes are warranted. We have changed occasional punctuation, and added or removed an occasional phrase or sentence for clarity. Where more substantive changes have been made, we have indicated the change in an endnote. More than 95% of the body of the paper remains as it was. The endnotes, of course, now differ quite a bit. We have used square brackets to indicate what is new and what is original in the NOTES section. Aside from these editorial changes, we have decided to release and redistribute the paper using a Creative Commons license that essentially makes it available to anyone to use, copy, modify and reprint for workshops and classes, as well as websites, and other means of dissemination simply provided they attribute the work to us and note any modifications. This of itself gave us reason and purpose to review and update the original work. [Endnote new]
2. Predictions that the election of Barack Obama, an African American man, as President in 2008 heralded a "post-racial" society have proved wrong. In the past two years, well-publicized events of police brutality against black people have led to widespread public protests, and quality of life indicators for people of color have changed very little during the past decade. The likelihood of another person of color being elected as President anytime soon is at this time not clear. The current US Senate is 96% white and 83% male (<http://thisnation.com/congress-facts.html>, accessed 9/22/15). Current figures for Fortune 500 CEOs are 95.8% white and 96.4% male (<https://www.american-progress.org/issues/labor/report/2012/07/12/11938/the-state-of-diversity-in-todays-workforce/>, accessed 9/22/15). [Endnote new]
3. Since 1997 there has been an increase in scholarly attention given to the study of whiteness and white American culture. Mainstream media now occasionally prints articles that focus on white people and white privilege. See, for instance, a recent *New York Times* Op Ed titled "When whites get a free pass," ([http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/24/opinion/research-shows-white-privilege-is-real.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/24/opinion/research-shows-white-privilege-is-real.html?_r=0), accessed 9/22/15). To the extent that this has taken place, whiteness is being decentered. But the prevailing social climate remains one in which whiteness is not often given critical scrutiny like that given to cultures of color. And when it is, it can lead to social backlash. See for instance another recent article, this one published by *USA Today* and titled "Professor gets hate mail over 'Problem of Whiteness,'" (<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2015/03/30/prof-re>

ceives-hate-mail-over-problem-of-whiteness/70697394/). The two articles noted here originally appeared a month apart. [Endnote new]

4. In the original edition this sentence read, in part, "feel good about himself or herself." Throughout this edition we have adopted the emerging use of gender neutral pronouns, in this case with the use of "themself" as the pronoun. [Endnote new]
5. In the original edition an endnote appeared here, reading:
 

See Newitz and Wray (1996) for a discussion of "vulgar multiculturalism" which "holds that racial and ethnic groups are 'authentically' and essentially different from each other, and that racism is a one-way street: it proceeds out of whiteness to subjugate non-whiteness, so that all racists are white and all victims of racism are non-white." p. 70.

Although we agree that racial and ethnic groups do not necessarily differ from one another in any essential fashion, i.e. that cultural differences are just that, cultural and not some inherent difference in human nature, we are clear that racism is a social construct that benefits white people and disadvantages people of color. Other forms of bias and discrimination, and other "isms" such as ethnocentrism and anti-Semitism, exist in our society. But racism is a specific creation of European and European American culture that originated and sustains a hierarchy of power, privilege and oppression through the social construct of race and by ascribing to everyone a racial status. [Endnote new]
6. We see very little change, if any, between the 1990s and the present year of 2015 in regard to how these features exist and are expressed. [Endnote new]
7. In the original editon, we used the term "transsexuals." Although this term is still currently used today in limited settings and circumstances, its use as a broad term is consider by many to be pejorative. We have updated our usage to the term, "transgender," which has broader application and acceptance. [Endnote new]
8. In using the term "racial/culture" we wish to focus on the cultural formations that give form to the racial structure and hierarchy of United States society. The historic process of racial ascription, based broadly upon the geographic origin of peoples (e.g. Africa, Europe, North America) has been accompanied by one of creating cultural borders, developing and maintaining distinct cultural practices, and continued experience of shared social conditions within racial groups that differs from those of other racial groups. [Endnote new]
9. Although the specific phrase "centering the margins" may no longer be in popular use, the strategy still is. Insofar as this approach signals an interest in inclusiveness and readiness to accommodate some level of change, we acknowledge its value. It moves one step beyond the sort of celebratory multiculturalism that shares various foods, fashions, and holidays and be-

gins to identify the "center" as the locus of transformation. But ultimately it is insufficient, and may be misleading as a pathway to change. [Endnote new]

10. The term "monoracial" means "of the same race." Consequently a monoracial group is a group in which all members are of the same race. Although this notion is straightforward, the term is a helpful one. Much everyday thinking about race focuses on differences between racial groups, and in anti-racist circles there is an acute awareness about the differences in power and privilege between white people and white culture in comparison to various peoples and cultures of color. The term "monoracial" is helpful when we wish to talk about what racial group membership means for members of racial groups, or a person in relation to a racial group—any racial group—despite differences in power and privilege and cultural expression among those racial groups. The term is most useful when talking about multiracial people, groups, experiences, and structures. Thus we can say that the individual experience of being a member of a monoracial group differs from the experience of being a member of a multiracial group, regardless of whether the individual be black, white, Native American, or even of multiracial heritage. The term "monoracial/cultural" follows in form the term "racial/cultural," and can also be read as a slight abbreviation of the longer term "monoracial/monocultural." [Endnote new]
11. The following paragraph has been deleted from the original edition. In retrospect, we believe the ideas we were casually naming in the paragraph deserved more detailed exploration and development, and that in some cases—in particular, our discussion of African Americans acknowledging native American heritage—the paragraph may have been misleading or inaccurate.
 

Another alternative would be to see a merging of Native American and African American identity in opposition to a still separate white identity. Even if things should head this way, it is doubtful it could happen in less than a generation. Native American identity is still expressed in terms of tribal nationhood to a large degree. While a broader, or pan-Indian, identity has been forming and becoming organized in the last few decades (Herring, 1994; Means, with Wolf, 1995), it still has not achieved the older institutionalized stance of the African American community. In the mid-1990s it is unusual, though hardly unknown, for an African American person to acknowledge their Native American heritage, though such heritage is itself fairly common. There does seem to be a trend toward greater acknowledgment of shared heritage by African Americans toward Native Americans, but social trends or changes like this take a while to develop. In the meantime there still exist real differences between these cultural groups. [Endnote new]
12. The term "decentering whiteness" was coined for our purposes by Dr. Charley Flint and at the time of the first edition of this paper we were not aware of any prior usage. Nonetheless, the concept of moving whiteness from the center of our society had already re-

ceived earlier discussion. See, for instance, Mike Hill speaking in "A Symposium on Whiteness" (1995) of the emerging field of "whiteness studies." Hill said, "The explicit goal of this work, of course, is to move whiteness from the center." Another article, published later the same year as our paper and not known to us at the time, was titled "Decentering Whiteness: In Search of a Revolutionary Multiculturalism" (McLaren, 1997). Since that time, the term has continued to appear, usually with no reference to earlier usages. It seems to be a useful term that has been independently created multiple times. As best, we can claim a very early usage. However, in our usage we also claim a very specific understanding of what the term means. Decentering whiteness, as we understand it, also requires a concurrent process of multiracial centering. **[Endnote original; some modification]**

13. This last point deserves more explanation than given in the original edition. White identity is historically based on the "one-drop" rule of hypodescent, meaning that one drop of non-white blood rendered a person not white. While this rule has not always been strictly adhered to, the guiding principle has remained intact. One must substantially be of European heritage and appearance to claim and sustain a white identity that is acknowledged by others. We are saying that white identity should be open to any person who has any European heritage, of whatever degree. This includes people who do not necessarily appear European in color or features. The criteria should be more one of heritage and cultural preference. We acknowledge that for a person who might visibly be regarded as a person of color to claim a white identity today is problematic in that it can be read as, and may actually be, a move to acquire the privileges of whiteness. But by opening up the possibility of white identity to a broader range of claimants—a sort of reverse one-drop rule if you will—the boundary between a privileged, monoracial, one-drop whiteness and racial/cultural groups of color will be much more difficult to police. Under this alternative, it would be possible for a person of multiracial heritage to claim both a white identity, and an identity or identities of another racial/cultural group. Some multiracial individuals do in fact do this today, but there is little social readiness to understand or accept their claims. **[Endnote new]**

14. The condition of the multiracial community in 1997 was starkly different than it is today. As our endnote in the original edition read:

In 1997 the "multiracial community," as it has named itself, exhibits signs of a developing self-consciousness and the inception of prototypical institutions serving this community's interest. Examples from media are *Interracial Voice* on the Internet (<http://www.webcom.com/~intvoice/welcome.html>) and *Interrace Magazine* in Atlanta, founded in 1989. Over eighty local community interest organizations, known as social or support groups, exist for multiracial people and families. National advocacy groups like the Association for MultiEthnic Americans, A Place For Us/National, and Project RACE bring

community interests before the media, state and Federal governments. The story of multiracial families has never been told as a continuous thread of history, though multiracial families have always existed in America.

In 2015, for reasons not clear to us, nearly all the media and organizations described in the foregoing paragraph no longer exist, and no similar media and organizations have replaced them. Despite a growing number of interracial marriages and a corresponding increase in multiracial family formation, the larger, organized elements of the multiracial community no longer exist. Recently one author heard two separate instances of people, one a young man of multiracial heritage and the other a white woman in an interracial marriage, expressing a need for the support and perspectives of the type offered by the media and organizations of the 1990s. They were unaware that such options had even existed. Not only have the organizations disappeared but the history of their presence has faded as well. **[Endnote new]**

15. Ignatiev (1995) notes that early 19th century slums in Philadelphia were multiracial in character. African American and European American households existed side by side throughout the poorer sections of the city. In other communities, race mixing has occurred within family units. Kennedy, with Kennedy (1997) describe the Melungeons, a Southern multiracial group. Cohen (1974) describes the Ramapo Mountain People, a multiracial community of Dutch, Indian and black ancestry existing since colonial times in the northern New Jersey/New York area. Blu (1980) and Sider (1993) discuss the Lumbee Indian tribe in North Carolina, a multiracial group variously designated by state authorities. Forbes (1993) discusses the evolution of "red-black" peoples. **[Endnote original; some modification]**
16. Goldner (1997) discusses 16th century utopian communities founded by renegade Jesuits and Indians in Mexico, and later other parts of Central and South America. According to Ignatiev (1995), in the 1834 Flying Horse Riot a Philadelphia tavern owned by a white man and serving a multiracial clientele was burned down by several hundred white men. Berea College in Kentucky, founded in 1866, was interracial until Jim Crow times forced it to choose between black and white. It chose white and today, once again working to become multiracial, Berea College is trying to heal the harm done to its sense of interracial community by that forced choice. Bryn Gweled, a community in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, was founded during the Great Depression era for people of different backgrounds and heritage, including people of different races. Koinonia Partners is a multiracial ecumenical Christian community in southwest Georgia, founded in 1942. Stalvey (1970) discusses the West Mt. Airy neighborhood of Philadelphia, a traditionally multiracial community when she moved there in the late 1960s. Ludlow, Ohio, an elementary school district in Shaker Heights, Ohio proactively sought to be an interracial community during the decade of the 1960s. **[Endnote original]**

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## About the authors

### Charley Flint, Ph. D.

Activist, educator, and scholar, Charley Flint is Professor of Sociology at William Paterson University, Wayne, NJ. She has also been on the Women's Studies faculty, served as Director of the Race and Gender Project, founded ALANA, a program of and for women of color in higher education in NJ, and helped to organize a Women of Color group as part of the North Jersey Anti-Racist Alliance.

Dr. Flint was the first black woman to receive a PhD in Sociology from Rutgers University in 1981. Among her publications, she is co-editor of *Transforming the Curriculum: Teaching Resources from the New Jersey Project* (Teachers College Press, 1995) which was influential in transforming the curriculum in integrating gender across all disciplines.

Co-founder and current Chairperson of the Board of Trustees for the Center for the Study of White American Culture, Dr. Flint is also Chairperson of the Board of Trustees of the NJ Association on Corrections, and a lead facilitator for the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) conducting workshops in the community and in male and female prisons. She was an early opponent of mass incarceration and continues her work and research on the intersectionality of race, class, gender and sexual orientation in the crime processing system.

### Jeff Hitchcock, M.S., M.B.A.

Jeff Hitchcock is co-founder of the Center for the Study of White American Culture and serves as the Center's Executive Director. He is author of the book, *Lifting the White Veil: A Look at White American Culture* (Crandall, Dostie & Douglass Books, Inc., 2003), in which he mixes descriptive analysis of the culture with stories of his personal experiences as a white male. During the 1990s he was active in the multiracial movement, serving as President of GIFT (Getting Interracial/intercultural Families Together), a social organization for interracial families and multiracial individuals based in Montclair, NJ.

Previously, Jeff worked as a professional in the nonprofit and private sectors, ranging from small organizations to Fortune 100 companies, including time as Vice President of Alfonso Associates, a minority-owned diversity and organizational development consulting firm. He received his MBA. from New York University (Stern School) and his MA in Social Psychology from Rutgers University.

Charley Flint and Jeff Hitchcock have been together as partners for over 40 years. They have two grown sons now making their way in the world.

## Chart I

### Features of whiteness as central, and how to decenter each.

Feature	Description	Strategy, guideline or goal for decentering whiteness and replacing the center with multiracial values.
<b>The standard.</b>	Cultural values are applied to all areas of human experience, often unconsciously, but sometimes not. The white standard of feminine beauty, for instance, is to be light-skinned, thin, full-breasted, devoid of obvious body hair, and blonde with European facial features. (Katz, 1978)	Ask what other standards exist, and from what other racial/cultural groups.
<b>Background.</b>	The culture itself is not a point of discussion, focus, or examination. Rather, things different from the culture become the objects of attention. White people, for instance, overwhelmingly concentrate on discussing and studying other racial groups. Whiteness and white people as a racial group are not discussed or studied. Taboos are present in white culture against bringing the discussion and study of whiteness into the foreground. (Katz, 1978)	Assume whiteness, and race, always structures our experience, and thus needs to be consciously considered as part of any social process.
<b>Normal.</b>	That which is expected of the average person. White people, often living in isolation from contact with people of color, view the customs and practices of white people as normal, and those of people of color as deviant. (Katz, 1978)	Normal is defined by one's culture. Different racial/cultural groups have different definitions of normal. A central definition of normal should be a multiracial one and a desire for multiracial contact should be assumed to be normal.
<b>The "common" understanding.</b>	That which the average person is expected to know and accept without question. Discussion is viewed as unnecessary, complicating issues which are already and firmly resolved. White people react negatively when another white person, or a person of color, questions some "common" understandings.	Ask, "Understood by whom?" and listen to see if both white people and people of color answer. When only white people answer, the "commonness" of the understanding among all Americans becomes questionable.

**Undifferentiated.**

Differences and rankings exist among white people, and various European immigrant groups have transformed themselves from "foreigners" to being white people (Ignatiev, 1995), but a white person, once that status is achieved, is assumed to be the same as any other white person with regard to whiteness.

Degrees of immersion in white culture should be articulated. Not all white people are equally immersed or involved in white culture or cultures of color. Some whites prefer monoracially white settings. Others prefer and are more knowledgeable about multiracial settings or nonwhite monoracial settings.

**Distinguished from other, outsider.**

Often the most conscious part of a cultural self-identity, white people spend a lot of time comparing themselves to people who are not white. Often the comparison is implicit and unspoken, with the focus being on examining "differences" in other racial groups and cultures (Terry, 1970).

One of many racial/cultural groups, all of whom have a more or less equal standing and claim on the American experience and American society.

**"Glue" that holds things together.**

The values of the central culture are seen as interwoven and establishing order on social events. In white culture, this is often expressed in the belief that multiculturalism will lead to conflicting and contending power centers.

There are severe problems with the "glue" experienced by non-white people. The glue (shared heritage and privilege) that holds white people together is not the same as the glue (power and coercion) that holds cultures of color to an American society that is white at the center. This glue needs to be changed to a multiracial one — one that expresses the belief that, despite the effort it requires, a social order that is characterized by cooperation, collaboration and justice is preferable.

**Comfort.**

Beliefs and values help the individual feel good about themselves. In white culture, this often means suppressing or reinterpreting efforts to discuss issues of dominance, conquest and exploitation of cultures of color.

*Now:* Hard for white people to find with integrity.  
*Future:* White people do not have to give up their racial/cultural style or identity, just their centrality. One's culture is protected from harm by a mutual agreement among racial/cultural groups to work cooperatively and not to exploit one another.



**Growth.**

The culture provides avenues for economic support and professional advancement. White culture makes these available to white people who have access to the culture, but not people of color.

Avenues for economic support and professional advancement should extend from a multiracial center. Acquisition of the customs and habits needed to function in a multiracial center should be a prerequisite for personal and professional growth. Limited growth opportunities should remain available to white people unable or unwilling to master the skills needed to function outside of white culture, but these should be modest in comparison to opportunities available in the multiracial center.

**Familiarity.**

Cultural learning takes place from birth onward, as part of one's lived experience. It is an outgrowth of day to day life. As such, it is very familiar, and even a little bland and commonplace to insiders. In white culture, this is expressed by people saying they "have no culture," are "bland" or "whitebread."

Whiteness is a cultural expression with European roots that stands alongside other cultural groups. This cultural expression has a unique character that differs from other racial/cultural groups (each of whom also have a unique character), and which may be appreciated by people from both white culture and cultures of color.

**Obviousness.**

Cultural values learned by children are not presented as if they are alternatives from which to choose, but rather simply the way things are done. The fact that "everyone" acts that way makes it seem "obvious" that is how people should act.

White cultural practices should be presented as one alternative among several. (Katz, 1978)

**The way everyone does it.**

Cultures will only permit one set of values, rather than competing sets. Part of the function of culture is to let everyone interact through some shared basis of meaning and understanding. Within a culture, "everybody" does tend to do things the same way — to use the same language, celebrate the same events, etc. In white culture this is sometimes expressed as a belief that people of color must automatically know how "people" do things, i.e. how white people do things.

Distinguish between making universal statements (e.g. "The way every person does it") and statements which really are more culturally specific, (e.g. "The way every white person does it"). Do not try to use the two interchangeably.

<b>Not open to contradiction.</b>	The center of a culture tends to defend its values and to place negative sanctions upon people who question them. White culture is antagonistic to people of color who contradict its values, or who take espoused values of white culture and demonstrate that white culture has not lived up to them.	Must contend for the center and for understanding as one of many racial/cultural groups. Can be contradicted in the process, like any other group.
<b>Affirmation.</b>	Being in the center offers a feeling of belonging, of being an OK person, and having a place in society and in the world. White culture sometimes expresses this affirmation in terms of being "American," when in fact it is affirming only white Americans.	Available to all those who feel a connection to European American culture. Whiteness still observes the "one drop" rule of hypodescent. This should be modified to allow any person with a cultural and/or genetic tie to European American culture to identify as white. Identification should not be posed as an either/or situation. People of mixed ancestry, or who gravitate to a mixture of cultural influences, should be able to acknowledge all these influences, including whiteness.
<b>Morally correct.</b>	The values of the center are seen as morally correct and those of other cultures are viewed as less morally sound. White culture frequently conveys stereotypes of cultures of color that attempt to place these cultures on a lower moral plane than white culture.	Within its local context, but not above the multiracial center, and not according to any absolute biological or cultural principle.
<b>Not marginal.</b>	A negative way of defining one's cultural self-definition. White people characteristically see themselves as not "black," not "people of color," and not "foreigners."	Somewhat marginal, influencing the center but not central itself.
<b>Essentialized as dominant.</b>	That is, not subject to commonalities that all human cultures share. Not having some measure of both good and bad characteristics. Viewed as an extreme in terms of goodness or evilness. By some, whiteness is viewed as inherently and entirely evil, comprising only power and privilege. This view generally sees no possibility for white culture to transform itself to a less central and more enlightened form. Others view whiteness as exclusively good, unique, and deserving of its rewards. This view generally believes whiteness can transform itself, but sees no reason to do so. Any transformation is viewed as a threat.	Understood as having had many advantages and having acted on them.

**Ordained by God.**

Clearly evident in the past, and sometimes present, practice of white Americans. The pulpit has often been used to justify whiteness.

No longer ordained by God, if ever.

**Access to power and resources.**

Access depends on adhering to the central values of the culture, and showing a willingness to act in its defense. White culture, having defined people of color as outsiders, never fully accepts the claims of people of color to share its central values, or to defend these values faithfully.

Available from centers of racial/cultural groups, but mostly from the multicultural center.

**Secure from disruption from the margins and beyond.**

No culture can tolerate continual disruption of its internal processes and hope to retain its form and structure. The central part of a culture is that part which is most defended by members of the culture. Some values may be important aspects of cultural self-definition, but other, more central, values are worth dying for. In white culture, for instance, the value of individuality is often felt by white people to be a central point of defense.

Security provided by the multiracial center, and agreement among racial/cultural groups.

**Adopting values of others through choice or environmental necessity, not by coercion from another cultural group.**

All cultures change and evolve, often under the influence of changes in the environment, and/or through contact with other cultures. White culture has operated this way vis-à-vis cultures of color, but it has not extended the same courtesy or freedom of self-directed change to cultures of color.

Continue as is, but will need to adopt multiracial values in order to participate in the center.

**A self-centeredness that says all the above features makes one "better" than marginal groups.**

In white people, this is termed "racism," "prejudice," "white supremacy," and "internalized dominance." As a general cultural process it might also be called "ethnocentrism." People in the center tend to absorb an attitude of superiority. If the center is power, and if power corrupts, this feature describes a sort of psychic corruption often shared, sometimes unconsciously and other times consciously, by people who occupy the center.

While hardly commendable, this is a value that can be sustained in a mono-racial/cultural setting. So long as a racial/cultural group is not in the center, a value of self-centeredness will have limited impact on people from other racial/cultural groups. Nonetheless, a value of self-centeredness will hinder functioning in the multiracial center, and thus will keep those who hold this value from gaining access to resources the center controls.