

# MEMO

## on Racial and Ethnic Tensions

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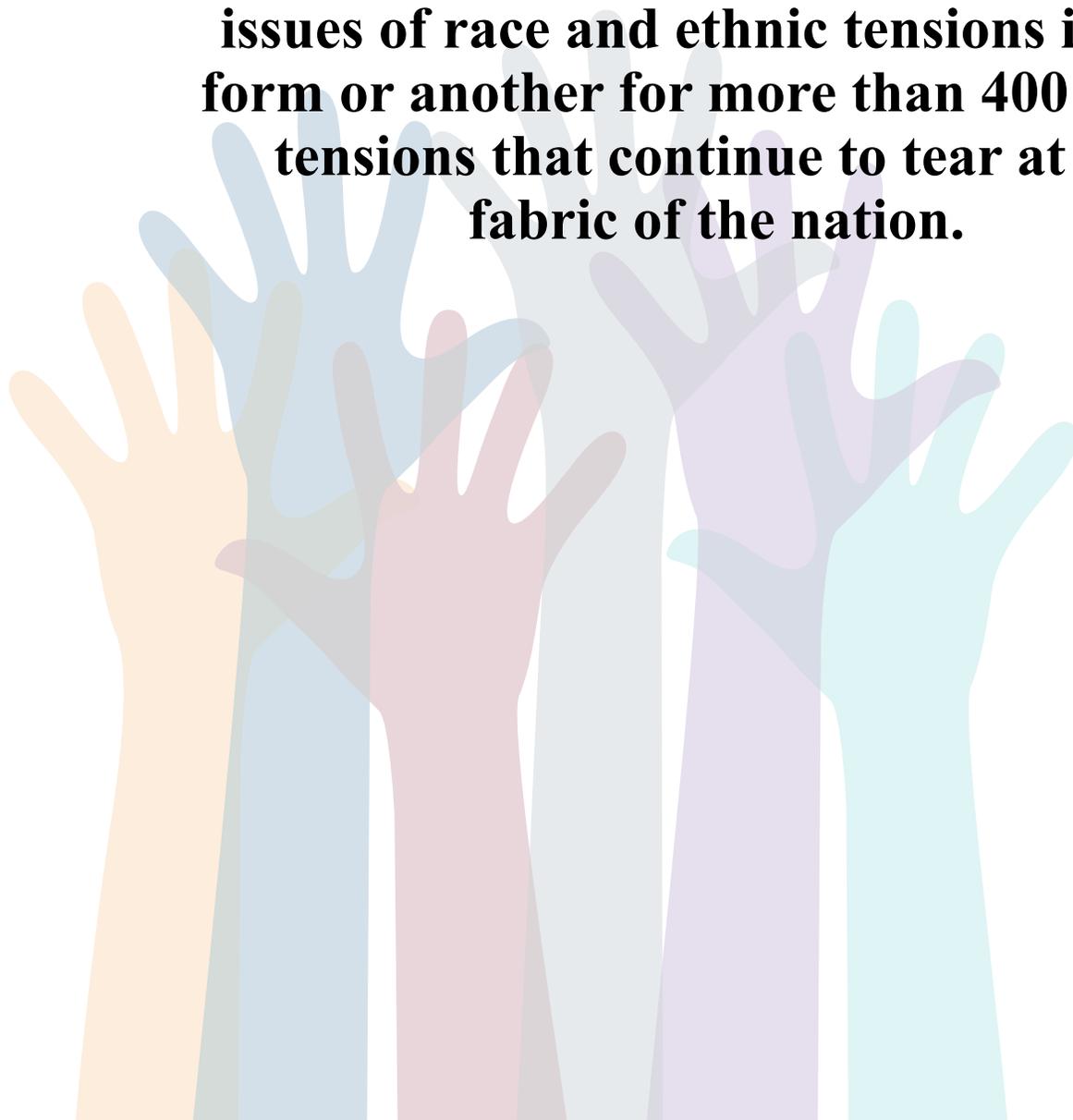
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## INTRODUCTION

From its first colonial moments, race- and ethnicity-related issues have been an inescapable aspect of the American experience, as documented in the tortured relations between former English citizens and indigenous tribes in the 13 colonies. With the subsequent introduction of slavery, race and ethnic relations have defined American economic, social and political systems and practices, remaining an omnipresent attribute of American life following a devastating Civil War and failed Reconstruction Era. The seemingly endless struggle was reflected in racial segregation and overt discrimination against Poles, Italians and the Irish in the 19th Century, and in anti-Semitism and anti-Catholicism, Japanese “internment,” race riots and public lynchings of thousands of African Americans well into the 20th century.

In his seminal 1903 book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. DuBois wrote: “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line—the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea.” In many ways, the United States has struggled with issues of race and ethnic tensions in one form or another for more than 400 years—tensions that continue to tear at the fabric of the nation.

In recent years, several theoretical perspectives have been advanced to understand and explain the genesis of racial and ethnic tensions within the nation. Chief among these are: **Critical Race Theory**, **Internal Colonialism Theory**, **Intersectionality Theory**, and **Aversive Racism Theory**. In addition, the framing and portrayal of racial/ ethnic issues in various mass and social media have become even more pervasive and diverse than those of earlier times (e.g., D. W. Griffith’s 1915 motion picture *Birth of a Nation*). Moreover, media portrayals now tend to reflect a broader spectrum of various perspectives and audience-segmentation along such variables as race, gender, age and political perspectives. There is increased recognition that racism, ethnocentrism, sexism and other types of *-isms* have psychological consequences for both victims and perpetrators, and vast and continuing implications for society and public policy.

Powell argued in his provocative book *Racing to Justice* that the United States has not yet achieved a post-racial society and there is much work to do to redeem the American promise of an inclusive democracy. He advocated for replacing attitudes and institutions that promote and perpetuate social suffering with those that foster relationships and transcend disconnection and separation. For example, he proposes the use of “opportunity maps” agreed upon by Black communities and others to transform racially and socioeconomically segregated urban communities into integrated, multi-racial communities. These maps provide communities with an actionable agreement for improving race relations by changing the terms and conditions of place and space. Another example is the Seattle Race and Justice Institute, a comprehensive effort by Seattle municipal government to promote racial justice and sensitivity in all facets of city government from hiring to budgets, from municipal services to police protection.

It is through these varied lenses that this memo is written. It presents a concise summary of the genesis and dimensions of current racial and ethnic tensions in the United States as seen through some of the most common contemporary theoretical frameworks, and communicated through the nation’s “engaged media” across the political spectrum. It offers up the leading psychological theories, structural components, mental health effects, public policies and ongoing debates about racial and ethnic tensions—and suggests strategies for how communities might use these perspectives to mitigate racial and ethnic tensions locally. Finally, it shows examples of communities that have already begun to experiment with such approaches

## UNDERSTANDING RACIAL AND ETHNIC BASED TENSIONS

To understand what drives racially and ethnically motivated behavior, it is important to understand how the attitudes that lead to such behavior are formed. Equally important, one must also remember that social scientists largely agree that race is not a biological fact, but a social construct. Several modern theories provide new perspectives for framing our understanding of racial-ethnic tensions in contemporary America. Many of these theories argue, in one way or another, that such tensions are intimately linked to pervasive attitudes of racism and ethnocentrism.

**Critical Race Theory**, for example, posits that race lies at the nexus of American life and influences individual, group, and systemic attitudes and behavior. This interdisciplinary approach to analyzing racial

tensions argues that racism is ingrained in the fabric and system of American society and perpetuated by institutionalized power structures based on White privilege and White supremacy. Advanced initially by Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman, it holds that these attributes perpetuate the marginalization of people of color. It challenges the notion that merit alone will advance marginalized groups to full equality. Its notion of institutional racism acknowledges that race and ethnic relations transcend personal or interpersonal exchanges and are defined by structures of oppression, including social, economic, political and cultural systems. Social justice and social change in race relations therefore require major institutional reforms and significant structural changes in society, politics, economics and public policy.

In **Internal Colonialism Theory**, Robert Blauner proposes that racial groups in the United States, particularly African Americans, are an internal colony ruled and managed much like one overseas, and characterized by oppressive economic, political and social systems controlled by Whites. In contrast, recent writings on post-racial theory present race as a less significant factor in society than was historically considered. Factors such as class are now thought to be prominent in contemporary race relations.

## **Intersectionality Theory seeks to demonstrate how constructs like race, gender and class are not separate processes.**

**Intersectionality Theory** emerged in the social sciences in the 1960s and 70s. Advanced initially by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, it argues that there are overlapping or intersecting social identities and related systems of oppression, domination, privilege and discrimination, e.g., such as gender, race, class, sexual orientation, age, ethnicity, etc. Highly linked to feminist theory, intersectionality challenges the notion that gender is the primary factor that determines a woman's fate, for example, and that gender issues alone do not account for the oppression faced by women of color vs. White women. It argues further that these overlapping social identities uniquely shape one's experience. Intersectionality seeks to demonstrate how constructs like race, gender and class are not separate processes, but intersecting social hierarchies that determine one's access to power.

**Aversive Racism Theory** illuminates the unconscious components of racism. According to this theory, many Americans may think of themselves as non-racist, but have unconscious inclinations towards prejudice called *implicit biases*. Research on implicit bias shows that people react quickly—sometimes automatically—to race, both cognitively and emotionally. There is evidence that racially charged situations can evoke emotional reactions and those reactions can lead to prejudice and discrimination. For example, one study showed that in a simulation of a crime, both college-aged civilians and the police have a tendency to choose a “shoot” response for Black targets and a “no shoot” response for White, Asian and Latino targets.

Psychologists have conducted extensive research not just to understand racially and ethnically motivated attitudes, but also to seek an understanding of how to make people more conscious of such attitudes. The work includes developing interventions to counter these attitudes. One study revealed, for example, that when Whites are rushed, they mistake harmless objects for weapons when they are associated with Black (but not White) faces. Importantly, the bias did not occur when participants were *not* rushed. This is one example of the significant finding that we can revise our initial judgment to adopt a more pro-social mind-set. For example, social psychologist Patricia Devine demonstrated that even low-prejudiced individuals go through an initial implicit bias phase that is automatic, but that this gut reaction can be tempered with wisdom and revised with motivation, ability and effort. Stewart and Payne found that the weapons effect (associating Black faces with weapons) can be attenuated simply by asking people to concentrate on being unbiased, such as by thinking the word “safe” when they see a Black face.

Banks and Hicks found that as Whites showed greater implicit racial bias, their fear increased their support of voter ID laws. This research demonstrates that fear and other related emotions can change one's attitudes and behaviors related to racial and ethnic relations and policies associated with the subject. Those with greater implicit racial bias had less support for voter ID laws when they were relaxed.

Fiske, Cuddy, Glick and their colleagues developed the **Stereotype Content Model**, which suggests that we classify social group members based on two central characteristics: warmth and competence. This model includes a BIAS map that delineates how stereotypes, based on perceived social status and competition, result in particular patterns of feelings like anger or threat, which lead to behavioral patterns of discrimination based on group membership. When a particular group evokes impressions that group members are cold—meaning they have negative motives and character—this perception elicits emotions of contempt, disgust and judgments that they are unworthy. One important conclusion generated by this approach is that emotions precede both thoughts and behavior. In other words, emotions are better predictors of discrimination, including aggression, than are stereotypes.

Based on these theories and models, one must conclude that matters of race, race-ethnic relations and racism are neither simple nor one-dimensional. As a nation, we have clearly made significant advances in understanding many of the factors that drive intolerance and discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, gender preference, gender identity, age or other social categories. Our national and local challenge now is to determine effective ways to attenuate racial and ethnic tensions in ways that will lead to a fairer, more just and cohesive society.

## **THE MENTAL HEALTH CONSEQUENCES OF RACE AND ETHNICITY BASED TRAUMA**

Often overlooked in discussions of the nation's struggles with race and ethnicity are the psycho-social and mental health influences that lead to intolerance, and their impact. Research has documented a number of mental health effects. DeGruy, for instance, has named the effects of racial trauma in the African American community as "posttraumatic slave syndrome." Carter also proposed the syndrome of "race-based traumatic stress disorder," distinguishing this phenomenon from general PTSD. Traumatic racism resembles other kinds of trauma in that it's experienced as sudden and uncontrollable, while leading to flashbacks, nightmares, cognitive symptoms, relationship problems, withdrawal and/or guilt. Some scholars have also documented the physical correlates of traumatic racism in the form of hypertension and ulcers. However, compared to other forms of PTSD, the catalyst for racial trauma may be uniquely chronic, and can lead to internalized racism, as well as be passed down across generations through collective cultural memory. Further, racial trauma may be worsened by the denial of race based intolerance and accusations of paranoia from the dominant culture.

# **Traumatic racism resembles other kinds of trauma in that it's experienced as sudden and uncontrollable.**

In addition to direct experiences of discrimination, race based trauma may impact mental health via internalized oppression and vicarious racism. Internalized racism has been argued to be one of the most profound and damaging consequences of discrimination; it's the process of taking on racist beliefs towards one's group and directing them at oneself. Internalized oppression can lead to reductions in self-esteem and psychological functioning. Turner further proposed that the internalization of racism in a color-caste, hierarchical society can lead to intra-racial discrimination among racial-ethnic minority groups. Vicarious racism can also lead to negative mental health outcomes. This secondary racism occurs when witnessing or learning about the racism that has happened to another. For example, a study of primary and secondary school students found vicarious racism was associated with depressive symptoms, anger expression and loneliness.

The theory of stereotype threat referenced above highlights the fact that when negative ability-related stereotypes are activated, academic performance can be impaired.

## **Invasive police encounters have been associated with increased symptoms of anxiety, posttraumatic stress, reduced disease resistance, depression, hypertension, obesity and chronic illnesses among African Americans.**

Recent media exposure of police shooting and killing unarmed African Americans has increased public awareness of police violence and perceptions of excessive use of force, particularly targeting the African American community. Police violence and the apparent targeting of Black males are among the most pressing issues of the day as seen in numerous communities, large and small, across the country. There is extensive research that demonstrates the deleterious mental and physical health effects of such violence on Black communities. Invasive police encounters have been associated with increased symptoms of anxiety, posttraumatic stress, reduced disease resistance, depression, hypertension, obesity and chronic illnesses among African Americans.

Mental health effects of race based trauma have occurred across a range of racial and ethnic groups that have experienced prejudice and discrimination. For example, anti-Arab sentiment in the United States has increased since the events of September 11, 2001, creating significant mental health risks posed by hate crimes and discrimination. Arab Americans have encountered racial profiling and discrimination, as well as raids by law enforcement agencies of their civic and religious organizations. According to one survey of the Arab American community, up to 25% of participants reported personal or familial abuse and discrimination in addition to a reduced sense of safety. Encounters with racial bias were associated with elevated psychological distress, reduced happiness and poor health among this group.

Intersectional relationships between race, mental health and class apply to the police violence problem. Rates of suicide and poverty seem to be strongly associated with a state's rate of police killings, with many victims exhibiting mental health issues. Hirschfield wrote in an article on lethal policing, "Approaching police with a weapon other than a gun signals a mental health crisis, and American police are seemingly more likely than European police to kill such people." Invasive police presence in communities of color may worsen mental health outcomes, and creates a cycle for individuals with mental health problems, who then may be at further risk of police violence.

Asian Americans in the United States have faced unique pressure to live up to a stereotype as the "model minority." Asian Americans encounter discrimination related to White Americans' fear of competition in education and employment, in addition to xenophobia towards Asian immigrants. Asian American youth in particular tend to be targeted by peers, contributing to negative psychological wellbeing, psychological distress, anxiety and clinical levels of depression. These mental stressors contribute to high rates of suicide among Asian high school and college students, magnified by cultural expectations of academic excellence. Yet, because of the model minority myth, Asian Americans' reports of racial discrimination are often dismissed or met with indifference by the dominant culture.

It's important to note that race based trauma poses mental health risks not only for people of color, but also for White Americans. There are a number of psychological costs to Whites for racial bias including guilt, shame, irrational fear of people of color, distortions in thinking about race and racism and barriers to relationships with people of color. Moreover, there is belief by some that individuals in historically dominant

groups often experience fear, anxiety and a sense of being “robbed” of what is rightfully theirs when their dominant status in numbers and power seems to be eroding. Current anti-immigration efforts in the United States and in some parts of Europe (e.g., Brexit) exemplify such feelings. While the harm of oppression encountered by dominant groups may be less severe in its daily impact, it cannot and should not be ignored in discussions of racial and ethnic tensions.

These observations and others like them give credence to expanding the framing of racial and ethnic tensions in America as more than a social justice issue, but also a public health issue. Stated somewhat differently, it’s reasonable to assert that “Race and ethnic based trauma can be harmful to your health!” If one accepts this notion, there are significant implications as to how the nation generally and communities in particular might approach (and fund) efforts to reduce racial and ethnic tensions.

## **THE ROLE AND INFLUENCE OF ENGAGED MEDIA**

Even as vestiges of America’s racial past linger, new forms of racial and ethnic tensions, including anti-immigrant attitudes, have emerged and are more overt. Perceptions of White privilege, implicit bias and institutional racism have become conceptual fixtures in the public consciousness of Americans, and fuel for a new narrative on race and racism. Police/community relations have eroded substantially in minority communities as more video documentation has emerged on apparent police misconduct. The nation’s engaged media has captured this unwieldy evolution of public attitudes about race and race relations, informing public opinion by chronicling and framing these issues.

# **It’s important to note that race based trauma poses mental health risks not only for people of color, but also for White Americans.**

A 2014 Pew Research Center study that examined the nexus between political polarization and media consumption habits found that it is virtually impossible for people to live in an “ideological bubble” because most people rely on an array of news outlets for information about government and politics. However, for those who are either “consistent conservatives” or “consistent liberals” there are marked differences in news sources. People identified as consistent conservatives were the largest block (47%) to cite a single outlet, Fox News, as their primary source for news about government and politics. People identified as consistent liberals gathered their news from a number of outlets: CNN (named by 15%), NPR (13%), MSNBC (12%) and The New York Times (10%). It should be noted that those on the far left and the far right of the political spectrum represent only twenty per cent of the population, but they are highly influential because they are the most politically active by voting, donating to campaigns and directly participating in politics. Of all respondents who use the web, 49 per cent get news from local television and 48 per cent get news from Facebook.

As evidenced, we note a dramatic difference in news coverage about issues regarding race and ethnic relations between most media outlets and the conservative news outlets and commentators. It can, in some part, be attributed to the fundamental differences in opinion between those who are consistently conservative and those who are more liberal in their outlook on race and related issues. Conservatives tend to support the concept of America as a colorblind society. A common refrain, for instance, is that Blacks in the nation have made tremendous progress on the political, social and economic fronts. However, these news outlets generally do not investigate the persistent socioeconomic inequities between most blacks and most whites in the country. The second argument is that instances of racial inequities are exaggerated by people and organizations left of center for their own political gain. Such views lead to the perspective that race and ethnic

related discussions aren't fully warranted, thereby leading to the paucity of stories about such relations in conservative publications.

The following is a sample of the past three years' coverage by major progressive, moderate and conservative media outlets, including coverage in minority media, on racial and ethnic tensions in the country.

**National Journal.** Two seminal articles by Ronald Brownstein (*Red Power, Blue Power* and *Americans Are Once Again Divided by Race*) frame the national discussion about racial and ethnic tensions as a response to a cultural and demographic shift welcomed by some and actively resisted by others. For example, a recent ABC News poll reported that most Americans under the age of five are not White. Brownstein calls the opposing factions "Browns" and "Grays." Browns are a democratic coalition that includes minorities, the educated and especially single, White secular women. The Grays are older, conservative and less educated White Republicans. White Democrats in this group specifically are uncomfortable being part of any group that is all White. They see diversity on a team and in the country as a genuine strength. The Grays harken back to the America in which they grew up where the White, straight, Christian male is in a position of power with which they are comfortable. In fact, they are uncomfortable seeing that balance of power shift. The Grays "fiercely resist" cultural shifts such as gay marriage and a Black president. Brownstein characterizes these Republicans' "implacable opposition" as a kind of "stand your ground" White resistance to "minorities' rise."

These articles mirror the focus on an intersectionality approach for understanding social groups; the *Journal* calls it "overlapping" demographics. It is not accurate to talk about Whites as a group, given that White, college-educated, single women feel and behave very differently as a group than older, White, blue collar, non-college educated voters. In *The Appeal of Trump-ism*, the *Journal* discusses this latter demographic, calling them "disaffected voters" who think that their America is going away fast, which they resist. Unlike Nixon speaking of the "silent majority," when Trump uses the term, it is aimed at a shrinking demographic: among today's voters, 44% are non-college educated, while 33% are college educated, and about 25% are non-Whites. Thus, non-college educated Whites are not the numerical majority.

Several times in its coverage, the *Journal* refers to a small set of specific race-related events that have acted as watershed moments in American race relations and generated extensive dialogue. These include the shooting of Trayvon Martin and the acquittal of his shooter, George Zimmerman; the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO, by White policeman Darren Wilson; and when Dylann Roof shot and killed nine Black churchgoers in Charleston, SC. The *Journal* published *The Culture Warrior in Winter*, a cautionary tale about the ousting of Richard Long as a right-wing leader after Long made public comments on his radio show about the Martin shooting. He accused Black leaders who spoke of the case as being "race hustlers," using incendiary speech about race trying to "gin up" the Black vote. Long lost his standing among conservatives based on these comments.

## **Journalist Ta-Nehisi Coates calls Blacks in the American prison system the "outlaws of the American imagination."**

**Atlantic Monthly.** Notable for his coverage of race and ethnic relations is *Atlantic* national correspondent Ta-Nehisi Coates, an African American journalist and the author of *Between the World and Me*, which won the National Book Award in 2015. Across the three-year period reviewed, the *Atlantic* published a number of features by Coates, as well as chronicling and contextualizing several of his pieces in their article *2015: The Year in Race Relations*. The magazine excerpted *Between the World and Me* as *A Letter to my Son*, which they describe as "an exploration of the heritage of Black exploitation." In this feature, Coates explains to his son that Whiteness is a dream. These references to the dream of Whiteness refer to phenotypic Whiteness as a marker of privilege. On a similar note, a recent exhibit shown at the Smithsonian Museum of Natural

History, “Race: Are we so different?”, proposed that the racial groups we speak of do not really exist as discreet categories. Notably, Coates tells his son that it is up to him to exist in our culture as it is, including the reality that “the police departments of your country have been endowed with the authority to destroy your body.” Coates speaks of the fear that animates Black parents as they raise children in a world that is dangerous to them.

In *The Black Family in the Age of Incarceration*, Coates writes that the American incarceration rate is significantly higher than that of Canada, China and even Russia, our closest competitor. The rate of incarceration started to rise in the 1970s and increased during the ‘90s and 2000s. Coates calls Blacks in the American prison system the “outlaws of the American imagination” and says the vision of Blacks as “criminal brutes by nature” justified incarceration as a way to keep the White population safe: “The principle source of the intensifying war on crime was White anxiety about social control.”

Given Coates’ position at the *Atlantic* and the popularity of his book and other writings, the magazine published a number of supportive reviews, but also offered the article *Between the World and Me Book Club: Your Critical Thoughts*. In this piece, the *Atlantic* highlighted the critique of UCLA professor Melvin Rogers, who underlines the beauty and importance of the work, but also raises the issue of its perspective on hope.

Professor Rogers warns that Coates’ perspective takes for granted continued oppression and does not allow for the possibility of imagining the country beginning anew. Rogers wishes that Coates acknowledged a greater sense of agency and a call for hope and change at this pivotal time in history.

**The New York Times.** A July, 2016 *New York Times*/CBS poll found that 69% of Americans responded that “race relations in this country are generally bad,” up substantially from 38% who reported the same sentiment in a CBS poll taken 14 months earlier. The *Times* responded to this state of national agitation with increasing news coverage and commentary about race relations, diversity and inclusion. To more closely examine the key challenges many of America’s cities face in managing the needs and expectations of a diverse populace, in 2015 the paper and the Kaiser Family Foundation conducted research and produced a series of articles about Chicago, a major city with a long history of struggling with racial strife and disparity. The *Times* described Chicago as a city in turmoil with “revelations of questionable actions by the police, threats of a teachers’ strike, a school funding crisis and an uptick in violence.” The poll results showed a disaffected populace that was broadly “discontent with the police and those charged with overseeing them,” conditions that, when considered together, could be considered a crisis in government.

In this climate of racial tension and overall pessimism on the state of race relations, the July 2016 *Times*/ CBS poll found that there was great disparity in perceptions of how effectively local police departments were doing their job. Four in five Whites said local police departments were doing an excellent or good job while two-fifths of Blacks said police in their communities made them feel more anxious than they made them feel safe. Overwhelmingly, Whites and Hispanics said police make them feel safer.

As an effort to present more diverse perspectives, the *Times* introduced the “Race Stories” series featured on the “Lens Blog.” It was described as “a continuing exploration of the relationship of race to photographic portrayals of race.” The *Times* opinion section created OP-DOC, a series of short, interactive and virtual reality documentaries produced by emerging and acclaimed filmmakers who presented a unique perspective on various issues. As an example, a recent OP-DOC entitled, “A Conversation with Asian-Americans on Race” examined the opinions of a group seldom asked about race relations. Perhaps its premiere commitment to addressing race relations in the U.S. is the recent launch of “Race/Related,” a bi-monthly newsletter that features reporting and dialogue about race from many angles.

**The National Review.** Upon its launch, William F. Buckley, Jr., founder of the *National Review*, described it as a “conservative weekly journal of opinion.” The publication stands out among the others reviewed here in that it does not offer news coverage of events or investigative reporting, nor does it attempt to be objective in its storytelling, as would be expected from traditional news outlets. Commentary on matters of race or race relations generally tend to cast blame on members of the offending minority group. The Black Lives Matter movement has been the subject of a number of opinion pieces in the *National Review*. The author of one such story concluded the gist of the complaint of the Black Lives Matter movement is that “there is an epidemic of racist White policemen gunning down innocent Black people” and, in turn, members of the movement are advocating that police be killed. A common thread found in *Review* articles regarding

the Black Lives Matter movement and overall complaints of racial targeting by police is that police use force against Blacks more often than other groups because Blacks are more involved in criminal activity.

The stories entwine charges of excessive use of force by police with levels of Black-on-Black murder rates and a second storyline that the movement has led to decreased police protection in communities with the highest crime rates and most in need of protection. A *National Review* staff writer linked journalist Coates' with gangsta rappers NWA (producers of the film *Straight Outta Compton*), and referred to both as "angry Black radicals." Coverage on issues regarding race relations follow the traditional Black/White dichotomy instead of acknowledging the changing demographics that include growing numbers of Latinos, Asian Americans, Native Americans, Muslims and an influx of those who are foreign born. Another contributor acknowledged the poor state of racial relations and laid the blame on President Obama, using the argument that wealthy and privileged elites lecture members of the struggling middle class about their White privilege while disregarding the crises of high urban crime, increasing rates of Black-on-Black crime, illegitimacy, drug use and family disintegration, all for the sake of high minority turnout at the polls. The author's sentiment reflects the general consensus on commentary in the *National Review*: "No president since Woodrow Wilson has so set back racial relations."

**Minority-owned media.** Minority-owned media outlets have historically given a voice to the otherwise voiceless, covered issues that were ignored by mainstream media, and reported stories framed to consider the perspective of their audience. There is a long-standing dearth of minority journalists working for mainstream media. All minority groups together accounted for 22.4% of television journalists, 13% of radio journalists and 13.3% of journalists at daily newspapers. Minorities are now 37.4% of the total population. After President Obama's historic election in 2008, a frequent question in mainstream media outlets was, "had we reached a post-racial America where many Whites looked beyond race to vote for the first African American president?" While the question was bandied about by mainstream media with suggestions that it was young White voters who gave Obama the edge he needed to win, the National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA) posted a story that provided a more critical analysis of the election results and identified the surge in the number of minority voters and their allegiance to the candidate Obama as the deciding factor in his win.

After unarmed teen Trayvon Martin was killed by armed, adult community watch resident George Zimmerman, there was widespread public outrage but it was the Black press that told the story from the victim's perspective. While many articles in mainstream media focused on the validity and popularity of "stand your ground" laws, it was the NNPA that distributed a story about a hearing hosted by U.S. Rep. John Conyers, former chair and ranking member of the House Judiciary Committee entitled, "Protecting a 'Suspect Community: Forum on Racial Profiling, Federal Hate Crimes Enforcement and 'Stand Your Ground' Laws."

To a large extent, America's increasing diversity is driven by the influx of people from Spanish-speaking countries. This has brought a new set of challenges for meeting the information needs of a multicultural society. In an article analyzing the difference in mainstream media coverage of Hispanics and coverage by Spanish-speaking media outlets, a New America Media journalist noted that mainstream media attempted to analyze behavior of Latinos based on an irrelevant lens of race when that was not the issue reported on by Spanish-speaking media, nor the issue of most importance to their audiences. More importantly, the journalist cited the fact that the Spanish-speaking audience is not monolithic, and requires a multiplicity of media voices to accommodate its many perspectives. No matter the race or ethnicity, communities of racial and ethnic minorities need media outlets that focus on issues of relevance to them as a tool to stimulate effective civic participation.

In recent years, we see that much of the engaged media share a sense of urgency for racial and ethnic issues in the United States. Coverage across a variety of sources has focused on watershed events, including a rash of police shootings. There has been a common theme of fear, including, variously, fear of the police and fear of rapid demographic change. Liberal and conservative media have characterized these events and the reporting of them differently. Importantly, there has been a repeated call from some media outlets for what amounts to an intersectionality approach, acknowledging that one cannot consider race and ethnicity separately, but that one must consider that each person belongs to a number of demographic categories.

For example, older, White, blue-collar workers with less education are likely to think and vote differently than younger, white, college- educated professionals.

## **NEW DIRECTIONS FOR REDUCING RACIAL AND ETHNIC TENSIONS**

Based on research in clinical and social psychology, as well as advances in public policy, a number of strategies may help reduce racial-ethnic tensions in the United States. Some are discussed below.

**Advancing interracial and interethnic contact.** There is evidence to suggest that contact between group members can improve race and ethnic relations, especially if the contact is carried out under optimal conditions such as with institutional support, equal status interactions, common goals and seeing in-group members as representative of their group.

There are a variety of contact strategies that work, and many ways to expose people to other groups. A particularly productive one involves the notion that people in one's out-group are friends with people in one's in-group. This basic idea can break down fear and barriers and avoid pitfalls inherent in other strategies. For example, researchers in the U.K. carried out an intervention with school children that increased positive attitudes of English children towards refugees by exposing these children to friendships between in-group and out-group members. In this study, the friendships were generated from stories and were therefore based on the children's imaginations and ability to extrapolate from their stories to their real lives. They tested a number of specific implementation strategies and determined that the most effective strategy for advancing positive attitudes in the children were approaches that promoted the acquisition of dual identities of themselves and refugees. In other words, the most effective strategy was one that supported the notion that you can have multiple groups that you belong to.

The intervention shows that finding ways to demonstrate cross-group friendships is a very effective strategy for reducing cross-group tensions. It also shows that the most effective strategies are those that celebrate the individual group identities and also emphasize that all people involved are part of a larger group with mutually beneficial goals.

The successful intervention used storytelling as a mechanism for change. But extended contact can take place in many forms, as long as participants see that there are friendships between in-group and outgroup members. For instance, a forum could be structured to emphasize the personal friendship between the organizers, who are members of the different racial or ethnic groups in question. Research has indicated the potential positive role of using celebrities to reduce cross-group tensions, so using celebrities from the racial or ethnic groups in question as spokespeople for the cause—and emphasizing the friendships between these celebrities—should have a positive effect on participants.

## **Today's communities are more likely to be strongly red or blue than they were in the past.**

Recently, National Public Radio's *Science Friday* reported that today's communities are more likely to be strongly red or blue than they were in the past (<http://www.sciencefriday.com/segments/life-in-the-wrong-political-bubble/>). This means that minorities in those communities are stressed because they face social opposition: neighbors who think their views are "crazy" or "wrong." Political prejudice is also on the rise. NPR guest Liz Joyner from Florida's *Village Square* reported that her group addresses these problems of community polarization by beginning with building cross-group friendships. Joyner reported, "... you have to go in first through the relationship door; it's way easier to get there. Human beings have an amazing power of sort of reciprocal good to people that they know and they meet and they talk to and they break bread with. And so that's where you have to start and if you can solve issues later, it has to start with that relationship first."

**Social media.** In the current era, the Internet and social media hold particular promise and innovation for conversations about race. Recognizing that Americans are increasingly turning to social media for news and to encourage others to join causes, the Pew Research Center recently released a powerful new report that documents the growing centrality of social media in the framing of race and ethnicity in the United States. Citing posts on Twitter, Facebook and other social media, the Pew study shows that these platforms have become central to national conversations about race and racial inequality, particularly for millennials and those in younger generations. In addition, social media also serve as places where conversations about race intersect with a number of other issues, including pop culture, sports and everyday personal experiences.

The Pew survey also found some significant differences in the way black and white adults use social media to share and interact with race-related content. For example, African American social media users (68%) are almost twice as likely as whites (35%) to report that at least some of the posts they see on social networking sites are about race or race relations. Among African American social media users, 28% say most or some of what they post is about race compared to only 8% of whites who say the same.

Most encouraging from this report is that far more social media posts about race are supportive (40%) than critical (11%) of efforts to mitigate racial and ethnic tensions. More are also interpreting and discussing recent high-profile news events than reporting events. These facts indicate that racial and ethnic tensions are highly important to many Americans and that social media can serve as a positive way to share thoughts, feelings and support in times of crisis.

Clearly African Americans have used social media to advance protests against issues of racial inequality. The *#Black Lives Matter* hashtag, for example, was the foundation for a major activist and social media campaign to protest police violence towards African Americans. Ultimately, creative uses of social media may be used to engage Americans on matters of race and ethnicity in the months and years ahead—reducing racial and ethnic tensions while promoting the nation’s original values of freedom, equality and justice.

**Using exemplars as a strategy.** Because research suggests that exposure to countertypes (counter-stereotypical examples) improve attitudes and actions, any gathering or discourse about racial and ethnic tensions can profit from the strategic use of counter-stereotypical examples of group members. Research has demonstrated, for example, that invoking countertypes, as opposed to stereotypes, effectively changed Whites’ beliefs about Blacks. Similarly, exposure to countertypes of Black men resulted in increased pro-Black attitudes and an increased desire to vote for a Black male candidate, compared to the attitudes and intentions of those exposed to Black, male stereotypes. Furthermore, exposing Whites to positive news stories about counter-stereotypic, African American celebrities reduced stereotypic perceptions and racist beliefs. The take-away message is that using personal examples of group members who do not fit the stereotype for the group will help move the conversation forward and will have the power to change minds.

Live theater has been shown to break down myths about people and social issues. Boal’s Theater of the Oppressed is used around the world as a forum for victims’ voices. Entertainment can be used at the community level to spark conversation and open the door to learning. Theater, film and other storytelling media evoke emotions such as humor and empathy that can be instrumental to changing negative attitudes and beliefs. There are ways to bring in pieces of storytelling to community gatherings whether face-to-face or via computers. For example, participatory theater has been useful in addressing social issues in communities. New media can also play a key role in social change. Younger people are very used to sharing video and image content and may be more drawn to a strategy that uses media. Images and videos are powerful storytelling tools and allow many voices to be part of one movement.

Media can also be used to evoke empathy for those from other social groups. For example, researchers exposed children to the video game *Real Lives*, which simulates life as a member of another social identity. Those who experienced the simulation gained empathy and positive curiosity about those groups. Similarly, researchers who study “experience taking” (i.e., taking on the experiences of a character in a fictional narrative) found this technique can change our behavior and beliefs. Research has shown that when news stories are presented as a narrative, they evoke more compassion from the reader towards a social group (e.g., prisoners and immigrants), which results in more positive behavioral intentions and information-seeking than non-narrative news.

Finally, it has been demonstrated that children can be taught to more actively question stereotypes about the social categories they see in the media. This area is understudied, but holds promise. Canadians have done this kind of media literacy training for many years (see [mediasmarts.ca](http://mediasmarts.ca)). For example, there is an online curriculum for teaching kids about issues of diversity in media, including aboriginal peoples, visible minorities and the disabled (<http://mediasmarts.ca/digital-media-literacy/media-issues/diversity-media>).

## **A key problem we face in advancing persuasive arguments about racial and ethnic tensions is the polarization of the major political parties.**

**Values frames.** As discussed above, a key problem we face in advancing persuasive arguments about racial and ethnic tensions is the polarization of the major political parties. Research has documented that liberals and conservatives are motivated by a different set of values. Liberals tend to value caring, protection from harm and fairness or justice while conservatives tend to value loyalty, respect for authority and sanctity or purity. While having differing moral underpinnings may seem foundational to the problem, research suggests that this problem may offer clues to a solution. While we may be tempted to try to persuade the other side by raising the specter of values, we must take into account that others do not necessarily value the same things we do. In other words, asking a conservative to make a change based on a principle of fairness may not work, but research has shown that asking him to make a change based on loyalty may be effective. In the case of race, rather than arguing with a conservative that Blacks should be treated differently because of fairness, one might profitably argue that Blacks should be treated differently because they are loyal and patriotic citizens. One must craft a values-centered persuasive message using the values that the target audience holds dear, which may be different from the values of the person crafting the message.

**Match persuasion strategies to their root foundations.** Just as it is important to use a person's own set of values to frame a persuasive message, one must also take into consideration whether the attitude in question is primarily based on feelings or ideas. Research shows that persuasion attempts that are matched to attitude type are most effective. In other words, when crafting persuasive messages, don't try to change a feelings-based attitude with facts, or a facts-based attitude with feelings. Instead, fight facts with facts and feelings with feelings.

**Mindfulness.** Some believe that the solution to racial/ethnic tensions is a "colorblind" society, but that perspective has been challenged. In 2015, the *Atlantic* article *We're Teaching Kids the Wrong Things About Race* argued that we are teaching kids that discussions about race are racist and that being colorblind and avoiding the topic of race are socially rewarded. The notion of the colorblind society as a solution was also disputed by Rhonda Magee, an attorney and author of *Racial Bias and Mindfulness*. Magee contended that there is evidence that the colorblind approach actually increases implicit bias. The solution is to become more mindful, which will reduce bias. Research has, in fact, demonstrated the effectiveness of mindfulness practices on reducing implicit biases. For instance, using a six-week meditation intervention, Kang and colleagues demonstrated that lovingkindness meditation was successful at reducing implicit biases against Black and against the homeless. Magee reports on a mindfulness intervention at the University of San Francisco School of Law and San Francisco's District Attorney's office. The goal was to bring mindfulness to emotional and racially charged situations. See [mindfuljustice.org](http://mindfuljustice.org) for information on using mindfulness to reduce racial bias in policing and the legal system.

**TABLE 1. SAMPLE STRATEGIES TO AMELIORATE RACIAL AND ETHNIC TENSIONS.**

- In Lima, Ohio, a mayor concerned about racial tensions in his community brought together area ministers to talk about organizing a dialogue. Two churches agreed to start a unifying process by holding a study circle, with help from the local college in training discussion leaders. Four years later, more than 100 organizations—including 62 religious congregations and over 3,000 people—are involved. Results range from volunteer efforts, like a multiracial unity choir, to communitywide collaborations on violence prevention and a city-wide plan for hiring people of color.
- In Buffalo, New York, a series of highly publicized dialogues took place with students and educators from a wide band of cultural, racial and ethnic communities. The dialogues involved students from six city schools and six suburban schools. Over the course of a school year, representatives from each of the 12 schools came together to discuss issues related to race, ethnicity, faith and culture. Students now function as peer trainers, taking the lessons learned to their respective peers and recruiting the next round of participants. The dialogue and action plan focus on understanding and valuing differences within schools, and on identifying and teaching strategies for understanding and valuing diversity across school and community boundaries.
- In Richmond, Virginia, a citizens group inspired its political and business leaders to host “an honest conversation on race, reconciliation and responsibility.” At this event, residents came together to “walk through” their different racial histories. High school teachers and counselors responded to their students’ request for dialogue and offered their support as discussion leaders. Students from public and private schools, the inner city and affluent suburbs signed up. These young people, normally separated by race, income and geography, would meet once a week for six weeks in and around the city. A couple invited a diverse group of friends to a pot-luck dinner at their home to talk about racial healing. More than 40 people showed up. It was so successful that the group decided to meet monthly, each time in a different home. They invited the police chief, a county supervisor, a newspaper editor and other local leaders to take part as informal guest speakers.
- In Orlando, Florida, a town meeting, telecast live by a PBS affiliate, focused on questions of immigration and community, a volatile issue causing deep divisions among people there. It was attended by business leaders and average citizens of all ethnic, gender, age, religious, cultural and political groups in Central Florida. The meeting prompted more than 200 Central Floridians to participate in concurrent “home dialogues,” where groups of 5-10 individuals meet face-to-face on the same day to discuss the challenges of race, culture and ethnicity in their lives. The number of people wishing to participate in home dialogues increased to more than 300.
- In Des Moines, Iowa, leaders from various communities and faiths gathered for serious discussion and debate on issues of concern to residents. Subsequent conversations explored these and other issues, such as the effect of corporate downsizing on race relations in Des Moines. Each of the conversations involved community residents, students and other civic leaders. The dialogues prompted specific actions and participants are exploring potential projects on which a coalition of individuals and organizations could work. Building on the interest and excitement generated by the dialogue series, ongoing, more clearly focused dialogues identified common ground, common concerns and common values, and resulted in a redefinition of community.

# Police in Hillsboro, OR, have taken part in a successful program of mindfulness training.

Police in Hillsboro, OR, have taken part in a successful program of mindfulness training developed to improve their performance (Woolington, 2014). The program, based on Jon Kabat-Zin's very successful Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction curriculum, was developed by Hillsboro policeman Richard Goerling, Brant Rogers, a yoga instructor certified in MBSR, and Michael Christopher, a psychology professor at Pacific University. The program is based in part on the premise that unchecked emotionally charged situations can lead to harm. This is especially applicable to racial bias and policing. The program worked: "Cops in the class showed significant improvements in perceived stress and police stress. They also showed significant improvement in mindfulness, resiliency, mental health functioning and levels of anger, among other areas."

The Community Relations Service (CRS), a component of the U.S. Department of Justice, created by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to help resolve community racial conflict through non-coercive, third party intervention, helps communities resolve disputes arising from biases of race, color and national origin. Consequently, agency conciliators have developed extensive experience in issues associated with racial and ethnic conflict. Box 1 describes a number of other specific strategies that the Community Relations Service of the DOJ has implemented in locations around the country. These possible strategies for reducing racial and ethnic tensions are meant to place "*new wine into new bottles*" through community dialogues and ultimate engagement. New realities often demand new approaches to dealing with them. Old approaches to addressing racial and ethnic tensions have brought us to this moment in time, but we now know more about the genesis and consequences of racial and ethnic tensions—and we have more tools and data on previous efforts to inform our actions going forward.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Although they have taken different forms in different generations, the fact remains that the social constructions of race and ethnicity have been thorny, unresolved issues since the founding of the republic. While progress in ameliorating the *-isms* associated with these two phenomena has occurred, much work continues to be needed. Indeed, the case can be made that heightened instances of racial violence, eroding relations between minority communities and the police and polarizing political rhetoric in contemporary America call for bold, new approaches for addressing these issues. Moreover, the rapid growth of populations of color in many American communities, together with a growing restlessness among marginalized communities for full equity and an *ism*-free society, make new solutions imperative to achieve this lofty goal. Obviously old methods have left us wanting. Perhaps these newer models based on contemporary theory and research can point communities into new and exciting directions.

This memo has been written in an effort to generate thoughtful conversations and new, innovative actions to address racial and ethnic tensions in our country through the lenses of several modern theoretical perspectives about race and racism with attention to some of their psychological and health correlates. Like the Kerner Commission Report of 1968, we have framed a portion of our discussion within the context of the media, with particular attention to newer social media. We have proposed some implications for public policy, and especially some avenues for community discussion and engagement, some of which emanating from encouraging new initiatives in communities around the country. Although progress in eliminating racial and ethnic tensions in the country has been painfully slow, we believe like Thomas Parker, the Unitarian abolitionist in the nineteenth Century, and Martin Luther King, Jr. more than a century later—"The arc of the Moral Universe is long, but it bends toward justice."

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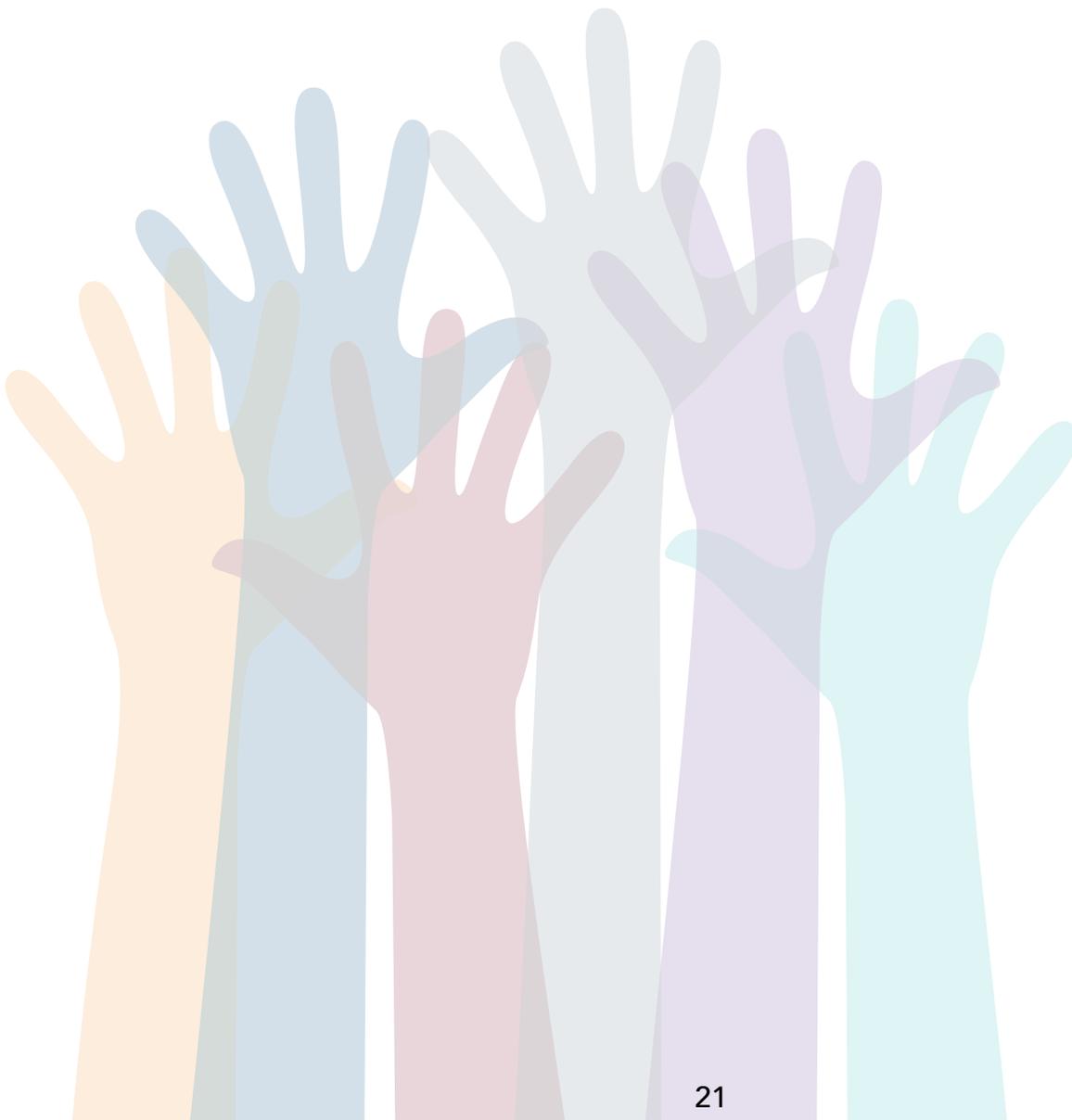
## ABOUT THE MARIE FIELDER CENTER

The Marie Fielder Center for Democracy, Leadership and Education is a multidisciplinary research and advocacy center created to advance diversity and inclusion throughout society. It honors the life and legacy of the late Marie Fielder, PhD, a brilliant and influential African American educator and champion for social justice, and founding member of Fielding Graduate University in the 1970s. The Center aims to become a significant national entity for advancing public discourse and advocacy on social democracy, leadership and especially education—K-12 through university.



## ABOUT FIELDING GRADUATE UNIVERSITY

Fielding Graduate University is an accredited nonprofit leader in blended graduate education, combining face-to-face and online learning for scholar-practitioners living and working anywhere in the world. Fielding's faculty members are mentors, representing a breadth of scholarship and practice in both the School of Leadership Studies and School of Psychology. Fielding students use their education to become powerful and socially responsible leaders in their disciplines, communities and workplaces, and throughout society.



**This memo has been written in an effort to generate thoughtful conversations and new, innovative actions to address racial and ethnic tensions in our country through the lenses of several modern theoretical perspectives about race and racism with attention to some of their psychological and health correlates.**



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