



# Kalamazoo's Summit on Racism

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### Preamble

Racism continues to plague American culture because we continue to employ the same old problem solving strategies for its elimination. These strategies, often masked by new and creative approaches, are embedded in dated racial philosophies that have proven ineffective in eliminating racism at its roots. Because these solutions are focused on "treating" "saving," or "compensating" selected victims of racism, they do not address the sources of social inequity, inequality and injustice. In order to produce timely solutions to social problems, which continue to evolve despite our best intentions to thwart them, we must consciously examine our thoughts about racism and how it manifests. This is the charge of Kalamazoo's Summit on Racism.

It is given that racism is intrinsic to the American way of life. One way or another, all of us are affected by it. Its elimination demands that each of us take responsibility for identifying and changing those thoughts and behaviors that support it. The first step towards this dramatic change requires that we suppress our egos - (e.g. "I'm not racist." Or "One of my best friends from work is black." Or "My parents were immigrants and we worked hard for what we have; nobody gave us anything.") - and our feelings of guilt - (e.g. "Yes, Slavery was terrible, but what has that to do with me?" Or " The problem is too large! What can one person do?"). Otherwise, we become mired in meditations that prevent us from solving the larger problems that plague our community. Shifting our perspective from the subjective to the objective-that is, from ourselves to the sources of Racism - is necessary to facilitate the Summit's initiatives.

Since our individual perceptions of Racism differ on the basis of experience, exposure, education, socio-economic status, etc., we must agree upon certain interpretive foundations and operative principles as we dismantle institutional racism. A common understanding of assumptions and actions will allow the Summit to unify its efforts in eliminating the practice of racism from our community.

## The Role of Kalamazoo's Summit on Racism

- ***Challenging White Supremacy:*** Our society is founded upon principles that promote white supremacy as the mainstream culture. Poor people, including whites, and those whose cultural practices differ from the mainstream's are denied access to that privilege. **The role of the Summit is to acknowledge how racism based on mainstream privilege works and to eliminate institutional structures and social practices that thwart equality, equity and justice for all.**
- ***Promoting Cultural Competence:*** Generally, people of privilege only understand mainstream culture because it is dominant, as things stand now. Those who are denied privilege must be competent in the culture that excludes them, as well as their own. Multiculturalism is founded upon cultural competence among and between groups. **The role of the Summit is to foster general cultural competence among and between groups, and to displace white supremacy with multiculturalism as the dominant socio-cultural construct.**
- ***Eliminating Institutional Racism:*** The dominant culture often focuses on blaming or helping victims of racism rather than eliminating the structures that perpetuate it. This leads institutional racism unaddressed. Providing assistance to victims of racism is not a step towards eliminating it. **The role of the Summit is to focus our efforts on changing systems that perpetuate racism.**
- ***Taking Direct Action:*** Kalamazoo, like cities across the nation, is not free of racism. It is safe to assume then that our community reflects national trends about race regarding racism in housing, education and employment, thereby eliminating our need for further research. **The role of the Summit is to engage in action-oriented initiatives vs. research or study.**
- ***Focusing on Racism:*** Poverty, although often intertwined with racism, is not the same as racism, and, therefore cannot be treated with the same solutions. Summit participants should - in all venues - ask and answer if and how any action our community takes addresses the elimination of racism. **The role of the Summit is to address racism in any proposed community solution to a problem.**

The objectives of the Summit are derived from these assumptions.