

Advancing Racial Equity in and Between Organizations: A Critical Race Lens on Nonprofit Human Resource Practice

Maureen Emerson Feit, PhD^{a*}

^a*Nonprofit Leadership, Seattle University, Seattle, Washington, USA*

*Correspondence concerning this paper should be addressed to Maureen E. Feit. Email:
feitm@seattleu.edu. ORCID id: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5190-9594>

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Abstract

Nonprofits in the United States are challenged with the task of attracting and retaining staff who have the unique skills, experiences, and perspectives needed to fill gaps, foster trust, innovate, create, serve, advocate, and organize for greater equity and justice. Yet, nonprofit human resource practices are not exempt from the social forces that reproduce and sustain inequity and injustice. Despite many pledges to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion, nonprofits have been criticized for perpetuating disparities within and between organizations. A critical race lens illuminates the ways that racism and other forms of oppression operate in nonprofit human resource practice and point to transformative approaches that may lead to deeper equity than we are currently seeing in the sector. This chapter challenges the norms of colorblindness and interest convergence, centers the counter-stories of people of color, and highlights strategies that may assist nonprofit leaders to redress racism, empower staff, and achieve their organizations' ambitious yet vital missions.

Introduction

The public expects a great deal from the nonprofit sector in the U.S. As scholars have highlighted, nonprofit organizations are charged with stepping in when the government and the market cannot or will not address gaps in food access, health care, and other vital services (Hall 1992; Salamon 2015).

Nonprofits are expected to serve as innovators, identifying needs and designing new solutions that reach community members who are excluded from essential institutions and systems. Nonprofits are lauded for fostering the relationships, communication, and trust that serve as the building blocks of strong local communities. They are designated as locations for people to come together to honor their faith, explore common interests, express their creativity, and share artistic experiences. Finally, nonprofits are expected

to represent historically minoritized communities and facilitate the advocacy, organizing, and collective action needed to repair injustice in the world, interrupting systems built on racism, sexism, ableism, homophobia, and transphobia; ameliorating poverty and economic exploitation; preventing human rights violations; repairing environmental degradation; and addressing other essential issues of our time.

Nonprofits are therefore challenged with the task of attracting and retaining employees who have the unique skills, experiences, and perspectives needed to achieve these ambitious missions. Human resource development, many have argued, is among the most important processes that nonprofit managers undertake (Selden 2017; Watson and Abzug 2016). It can also be one of the most vexing aspects of the work, as many organizations, particularly smaller ones, do not have designated human resource departments and many managers enter the work with little or no training (Renz and Herman 2016). Still, nonprofit managers must answer key human resource questions such as: What skills, perspectives and experiences do we need from the staff who will ensure we deliver on our mission? Who will we hire? How will we determine wages and benefits? How will new employees be trained and evaluated? What will the work culture be? How will disputes and conflict be addressed? How will we develop, retain, and promote staff?

As they answer these questions, nonprofit managers and their organizations are not exempt from the social forces that reproduce and sustain **racial injustice** in this country. We see this reflected in the staff and boards of nonprofit organizations where executive leadership is too rarely reflective of the people and communities their organizations serve. Despite years of initiatives to increase **diversity, equity, and inclusion** in the sector, the large majority of Chief Executives and Board Chairs remain overwhelmingly White¹, heterosexual, cisgendered, and able bodied (BoardSource 2021). Thirty percent of 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations have no board members who are people of color, and that number rises to fifty-eight percent for rural nonprofits (Faulk et al. 2022).

¹ There is debate whether to capitalize 'White.' This author follows the argument that capitalizing 'White' helps to signal that race is a social construction, situates Whiteness in history, and calls attention to the ways that White people and White institutions are racialized and involved in racism (Appiah, 2020; Painter, 2020).

At the same time, resources are unevenly distributed within nonprofit organizations. According to the latest data, approximately 12.5 million people are employed in the sector (Newhouse et al. 2023). Many of these workers face the historical legacy of low wages and under-compensation in the field (Pratt 2022). In recent years, calls for attention to wage equity in the nonprofit sector have grown louder. The Nonprofit human service workers in New York City, who are primarily women of color, are paid 20 to 35% less than their counterparts in the government and private sectors (Parrott and Moe 2022). In Washington state, the disparity is reported to be 37% (Romich et al. 2023). Racism continues to serve as barrier to career advancement in nonprofits of all sizes and missions, with people of color being tracked into lower-paid work and experiencing numerous obstacles when seeking promotion or positional leadership in their organizations (Abad 2019; Kunreuther and Thomas-Breitfeld 2019).

These inequities are further reinforced through the uneven distribution of resources between organizations, with nonprofits led by Black people and other people of color receiving significantly less support than predominantly white-led organizations (Carboni and Eikenberry 2021; Dorsey et al. 2020). Funding to rectify social injustice is also limited, with philanthropic organizations directing just a fraction of their dollars to support racial equity and racial justice work (Cyril et al. 2021). In 2020, in the face of Black Lives Matter protests against police brutality, many funders and corporations pledged to increase their support, yet many of these pledges have remain unfulfilled (Cyril et al. 2021).

In face of these realities, many nonprofit organizations have expressed their intent to build more diverse and equitable organizations. However, like the pledges from funders, many of these initiatives have stalled and remain unrealized (see Gómez 2022; Kunreuther and Thomas-Breitfeld 2019). This chapter applies a critical race lens to nonprofit human resources to illuminate the ways that **racism** and other forms of oppression continue to operate in nonprofit and voluntary organizations. These perspectives point us to new approaches and practices that may lead to change that is deeper and more transformative than we are currently seeing in the sector. The chapter begins with an introduction to **critical race theory** and follows with an application of key concepts to (1) challenge the norms of colorblindness and interest convergence in nonprofit human resources; (2) center the counter-stories of

people of color who share their experiences in nonprofit and philanthropic organizations; and (3) highlight strategies that may assist nonprofit leaders to make needed changes in their approach.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory is built on the observation that racism is a deeply rooted force in the U.S. and is so enmeshed in the fabric of our social order that it appears both normal and natural (Delgado and Stefancic 2017; Ladson-Billings 2016). Corresponding to no biological reality, race and racial categories are historically specific social constructions that society invents, manipulates, or retires as needed. Racism and the myths of **White supremacy** are deeply ingrained in the founding of the country, and continue to shape our systems, institutions, and social relations, whether stated explicitly or implicitly, resulting in deep disparities in the distribution of resources, power and privileges between people racialized as White and people who are **racially minoritized** (Omi and Winant 1994). Racial injustice and economic inequity are closely intertwined in our system of **racial capitalism**. As Robinson (2000) has argued, **structural racism** is deeply embedded in the history of capitalism in the U.S., where the ‘cage of racism’ has long shaped the accumulation of capital. Racial injustice and economic inequity are perpetuated by contemporary systems and institutions and shape many of the disparities that we see today.

Critical race theory emerged as a body of scholarship in the 1970s when U.S. legal scholars sought to understand why civil rights litigation had stalled in the face of a backlash against policies designed to create racial equality that emerged from the civil rights movement (Ray 2022; Taylor 2009). Legal scholars argued that the law, under the guise of impartiality and objectivity, usually advanced the racial interests of White people. Their work resulted in a rich and varied scholarship that critiques the traditional legal system and its role in legitimizing oppressive social structures (Bell 1992), highlights historical connections between **Whiteness**, property, and citizenship (Harris 1993; Lipsitz 2018), and challenges the slow and unequal progress of civil rights in the U.S. (Delgado and Stefancic 2017).

In the 1980s and 1990s, scholars of education drew from critical race theory to understand the specific role of racism in educational institutions and systems (Ladson-Billings 2011; Ladson-Billings and

Tate 1995). Frustrated with stalled civil rights reforms in schools, including resegregation in many school districts and the growing racial achievement gap, scholars documented how racism has hindered educational pathways and outcomes for students of color (Savas 2014; Taylor 2009). Critical race theory also influenced scholars in the humanities and social sciences as they grappled with the impact of race and racism on social life. Drawing from Black scholars and thinkers, ethnic studies, feminist theory, sociology, and history, critical race scholars developed a racial analysis that challenges dominant notions of meritocracy and objectivity, and requires close examination of the racialized structures, process and discourses embedded in systems and institutions (Solórzano and Yosso 2002; Yosso 2002). While centering racial analysis, scholars have also extended their analysis to intersections with gender, sexuality, class, disability, and other forms of oppression, and highlighted ways that difference can be transformed into sources of empowerment and reconstruction (Crenshaw 1991).

Critical Human Resource Development

More recently, scholars have drawn from critical race theory to expose and challenge the ways that racism is embedded in organizations (Ray 2019) and the field of human resource development (HRD) more specifically (Rocco, Bernier, and Bowman 2014). As scholars of HRD have argued, the earliest human resource interventions in the U.S. emerged from the institution of slavery, including the commodification of labor, the use of **scientific management**, and the hyper-focus on productivity, performance, and outputs (Bohonos and James-Gallaway 2022; Rosenthal 2018). As HRD emerged as a formal field of practice in the late nineteenth century, human resource management largely focused on skilled, White workingmen (Kaufman 2008, 10). Workplaces and labor unions served as the “key locus of acculturation” in the **assimilation** of European immigrants into American Whiteness and the material advantages afforded to those classified as White (Bohonos 2019, 320; see also Ignatiev 1995) and the paid workforce remained rooted in the historical exclusion of people based on race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and age. As a profession, HRD continued to over-rely on classical economic models, privileging the interests of management over the needs and interests of workers (Gedro, Collins, and

Rocco 2014). Whiteness and masculinity were embedded in policies and practices, crafting an idealized type of worker who perpetuates stereotypically **heteromascu**line behaviors like assertiveness, objectivity, control, and performance (Acker 2006; Bierema and Callahan 2014; Gedro and Mizzi 2014).

Like other organizations, many nonprofits reflect and reproduce racial and gendered hierarchies (see Acker 2006; Ray 2019). In contrast to the narrative that the sector's history is rooted in the pure benevolence of European settlers, the sector emerged from the profound inequities, injustices, and exclusions that were foundational to U.S. history (Feit and Sandberg 2022). As Gladden and Levine Daniel argue (2022), the American plantation system influenced the early development of fundamental approaches to charity, voluntarism, wages, and management. The sector has been widely criticized for its complicity with racial capitalism, pointing to the ways that elite philanthropists use nonprofits to increase the profit and shareholder value of corporations (Gautier and Pache 2015), enhance their social networks (Odendahl 1990), and shape policies in their own interests (Brulle 2014). The sector's relationship with **elite philanthropy** has also constrained advocacy and collective action in the sector, dampening structural critiques (Ahn 2007), diverting social movements (Francis 2019), and obstructing meaningful social change (Arnove and Pinede 2007).

As the sector became more formalized over time, many organizations remained focused on attracting support from elite philanthropy, tempering conversations about power and inequality, and deploying neoliberal forms of management that valued efficiency and economy over ethics, empathy, and justice (Catlaw and Sandberg 2018; Sandberg and Elliott 2019). Traditional human resource practices dominated the field, emphasizing compliance with the law and protecting organizations from charges of discrimination over building an organization that honors the labor and promotes the talent of its employees. Furthermore, both public and private funders discouraged investment in the "overhead" that enables organizations to develop healthy organizational systems and cultures (Lecy and Searing 2015). Throughout, many organizations uncritically perpetuated an "ideal type" of nonprofit worker that continues to be based in a Whiteness that reinforces White supremacy and a masculinity that reinforces patriarchy (Heckler 2019). The application of four critical race concepts further illuminates these trends.

Colorblindness

Colorblindness is a powerful social norm rooted in liberalism that encourages people to ignore or “look beyond” race, allowing leaders and managers to assert that race does not matter in the organization and that neutrality allows for equal opportunity for all (Bonilla-Silva 2014; Roberson, Ryan, and Ragins 2017; Sue and Anderson 2013). Through color-blind racism, nonprofits may erase, downplay, or obscure references to racial inequality. As organizational practices are deemed neutral and meritocratic, people who are socialized as White are given permission to avoid thinking of themselves in racial terms even as they receive unearned advantages. Attention is shifted away from policies or practices that perpetuate racism and projected onto individualized traits and behaviors (Bohonos 2019; Delgado and Stefancic 1997). The habit of avoiding or downplaying issues of racism becomes institutionalized in organizations, even those oriented towards social equity (Foldy and Buckley 2014). The weight of colorblindness is enduring, even in the face of explicit and intentional efforts to diversify organizations. It is not surprising then that diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives have been criticized for being more performative than transformational. As Ballard (2020) highlights, for example, many nonprofit and philanthropic organizations crafted external statements of support in the face of the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020 yet put inadequate time and resources into taking internal actions that would change their systems and practices.

Interest convergence

Interest convergence explains the phenomenon in which White people support a move towards justice only when it benefits their own self-interests (Bell 1992). We see this today in the ways that diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives remain shallow and commodified and ultimately benefit White people, conferring them a range of educational and organizational advantages without requiring deeper changes in systems and behaviors (Bohonos and James-Gallaway 2022; see also Kunreuther and Thomas-Breitfeld 2019). The concept of interest convergence illuminates the impact of long-standing racial

resentment among White people in the U.S: when White people have been unwilling to see their interests as tied to people of color, they have been likely to take action to address racial harm even if they themselves are harmed by the same policies and systems (Ray 2022; McGhee 2021). As Willner (2019) argues, nonprofit managers may also deploy **interest divergence**, upholding unequal systems to ensure that those in power maintain their advantages. We also see the impact of this in diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, when the true burden of the work is shifted onto the shoulders of people of color. Studies have shown that organizations expect staff of color to mitigate the effects of racism for their constituents even as they undervalue the high levels of service and racialized **emotional labor** this requires (Brissett 2020; Feit, Philips, and Coats 2022; Joseph and Hirshfield 2011).

Counter-storytelling

In addition to bringing attention to the impact of race and racism, critical race theory also encourages us to counter the marginalization of people of color through **counter-storytelling** (Bernal 2002; Solorzano and Yosso 2002). By bringing the voices and perspectives of people of color to the forefront, counter-storytelling centers the experiences of people who have been ignored or silenced in official narratives and accounts. This approach challenges colorblindness, sheds light on racial injustices, and strengthens traditions of social, political, and cultural survival, resistance, and change.

Counter-stories from the staff and board of nonprofit organizations are widely available, often located in activists and practitioner accounts. In the collection *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded* (2017), for example, multiple authors analyze the ways that the nonprofit system has been co-opted by government and elite philanthropy alike. Within the ‘**nonprofit industrial complex**,’ calls for systemic change have been muted, social movements weakened, and the work has been redirected to the provision of social services that are solely focused on meeting people’s most immediate needs. As the founders of the organization Sista II Sista recall, the effect has been particularly profound for women of color who are fighting to challenge the larger social structures that are imposed on their daily lives (Burrowes et al. 2007). As they stepped up their protests against police and other oppressive forces in their community, the

staff faced pressures from funders to change course. Rather than focusing on community participation and collective action, they found that much of their time was allocated to grants, site visits and reports designed to convince people “who just didn’t get it” (Burrowes et al. 2007, 229). After deliberation, they decided to shift their focus away from foundation fundraising, no longer employ full-time staff, and return to being an all-volunteer grassroots organization.

In other accounts, people of color share the challenges they have experienced when they have chosen to work within professionalized nonprofit and philanthropic organizations. In *Collecting Courage: Joy, Pain, Freedom, Love* (2021), Black fundraisers working in nonprofit organizations across North America describe the anti-Black racism they have faced in their work. In the predominantly White world of philanthropy, they were often the ‘first,’ the ‘only’ and the ‘other’ (p. xiii). They share their stories of discrimination, from erasure to **microaggressions** to outright hostility from employers, co-workers, and funders. At the same time, many describe the importance of breaking open spaces and using their agency to claim space, shape the distribution of philanthropic resources, and open opportunities for others. Similarly, in *Race, Gender, and Leadership in Nonprofit Organizations* (Gasman et al. 2011), the authors acknowledge the structural forces that impede nonprofits and foundations from serving as vehicles for change. They detail the immense pressures that women and racially minoritized leaders face, even as their change efforts are downplayed, dismissed, or disputed in their organizations. In the Gasman, et al. text (2011), Freeman describes his commitment to staying in the work by honoring his ancestors, challenging the stereotype of Black people as the recipients of philanthropy and not the agents of it, and expanding opportunities for women and people of color to exercise their visions and voices.

Intersectionality

Critical race theorists also urge us to embrace the complexity of human experience by attending to intersections between race with gender, class, sex, sexual orientation, disability, and age (Collins 2019; Crenshaw 1989). As Crenshaw has argued, it is essential for us to challenge the ways we have been conditioned to simplify the complexity of subordination as occurring along a single categorical axis. An

attention to **intersectionality** highlights the ways that varying levels of power and privilege interact with one another, creating a context for an individual's lived experience and shaping more possibilities for transformative social change (Donalson 2021; Garran et al. 2021). There are also times when it is important to maintain an intentional focus on race and racism in nonprofit and voluntary organizations, even as we acknowledge the intersections of race with other forms of oppression. As noted above, colorblind approaches and interest convergence can prevent organizations from acknowledging where and how racial injustice is being perpetuated. A strategically singular attention to race and antiracism can be an important intervention, particularly during the early stages of consciousness-raising for Whites or White-majority groups (Luft 2009).

Nonprofit Human Resource Practices

Critical race perspectives challenge the idea of neutrality in organizations, requiring us to address spoken and unspoken ways that racism shapes organizational policies, practices, and norms. In his discussion of **racialized organizations**, Ray (2019) invites us to ask questions such as: How do racial criteria shape hiring and retention? How are specific tasks and emotions assigned to different people along racial categories? How does racism hamper organizational culture and the ability of people of color to express their full humanity in the workplace? How are wages, benefits, and other resources distributed? And who benefits from training, opportunity, and promotion?

If your organization has not yet addressed these vital questions, where should you begin? How can you and your colleagues work towards greater racial equity in your organization and in the broader sector? While there is no simple recipe for change, there are lessons to be learned from leaders who have made great strides in their own work. Each of the following suggestions stems from people who have committed themselves to **anti-racism** and experimented with different strategies and tactics. As you review each suggestion, consider how you and your colleagues can adapt these steps to your specific contexts, experiences, and resources.

Assess the state of your organization

Nonprofit organizations come in many shapes and sizes. Ask yourselves: What is the state of racial and other forms of inequity in your organization? Even as you recognize the central importance of racism in the U.S., consider the complexity of racial identity and pay attention to the ways that race overlaps with other forms of oppression in organizational policies and practices. What are the lived experiences of staff, board, and constituents with race, racism, and other forms of oppression? What data can you gather to illuminate trends and patterns in hiring, wages, culture, climate, and retention? What can you learn from your organization's history and interactions with constituents and stakeholders? What efforts has the organization made to date and what change is still needed? As you think forward, what resources are already available to you and what additional resources do you need to identify?

Commit to the work

Given the deeply rooted habits discussed above, it is essential for organizations to commit and sustain the longer-term work that change requires. Those in positional leadership need to allocate resources in their budgets, build trust, reward staff for their time and effort, and persist even in the face of conflict, discomfort, and resistance. Organizations need to persist even in the face of rhetorical attacks and the 2023 U.S. Supreme Court ruling on affirmative action in public education need not have a chilling effect on nonprofits' advocacy for workplace equity (Gonzales 2023). Organizational leaders need to communicate their belief that people, communities, and institutions are capable of change, and maintain a sustained focus on the ultimate goals of transformation and **liberation** (Rogers and Jayasinghe 2021).

Develop a shared analysis

Anti-racist change initiatives can become derailed when people do not take the time to develop a shared analysis of the history and effects of racism in their lives. Action without an understanding of the issues can further engrain organizational inequities. Yet, as the Building Movement Project's *Race to*

Lead research has shown, extensive diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts have increased awareness in organizations, but people of color and White people still report substantial differences in their understanding of the role of race in the sector (Kunreuther and Thomas-Breitfeld 2019). If you are working to make change in your organization, coalition, or network, it is important to build a framework and shared language that you can use to analyze and understand how systemic racism and unearned White advantage are operating in your specific context as well as a vision for the justice and liberation you are creating together.

Share responsibility

As you pursue change, make sure that the time, tasks, and emotional labor of building an anti-racist organization are distributed equitably. Many people of color develop an acute analysis of race and racism through their socialization and lived experiences and may bring a “critical standpoint” that can lend organizations and systems important insights that promote racial equity (Fulton, Oyakawa, and Wood 2019). At the same time, working to undo the legacy of structural racism and White supremacy can come at a great cost, particularly when people of color are over-burdened by anti-racist and racial equity work. (Rogers and Jayasinghe 2021). It is essential to ensure that the work is shared, that the well-being of people of color is attended to, and that people throughout the organization are responsible for making the changes required.

Stay curious

Learning to name and describe how racism operates is essential to anti-racist work (Ballard et al. 2020), and White staff and board members to step up and actively seek out opportunities to educate themselves. People who have been socialized as White may need to cultivate curiosity about the impact of Whiteness in their lives, seek greater understanding of the lived effects of racism for their colleagues, and pay attention to the ways that systemic racism and White supremacy operate inside and outside of the organization. People of color are not monolithic either, and curiosity about the experiences of other

people of color may be essential for cultivating inter-racial understanding and solidarity. To move forward, staff can intentionally seek out new knowledge and take important steps to unlearn harmful ideas, develop different perspectives, and practice new ways of interacting and being in the world. This may require an open and honest accounting of the harm that the organization has perpetuated in the past. For example, as many nonprofits reproduce harmful **deficit-based** myths and images of the communities of color they serve (Bhaht 2021), and the organization may need to conduct an audit of communication policies and practices.

Create an environment for honest and generous dialogue

Speaking openly and frankly about racism is another crucial step in countering the color-blindness that stymies change. Human resource managers need to be aware that assuming neutrality in the dominant organizational culture creates an untenable double standard (Ballard et al. 2020; Bohonos 2019) and failure to acknowledge White supremacy in nonprofit spaces only disincentivizes the close examination of power that anti-racist work requires (Gladden and Levine Daniel 2022). By contrast, **deep equity** work pays “ongoing attention to hearts, minds, behaviors, and structures” without re-creating harm (Petty and Dean 2017). Rather than defaulting to the politeness characteristic of so many nonprofit cultures, leaders need to foster relationships and model a kindness that is rooted in empathy, honesty, authenticity, and open dialogue (Petty and Dean 2017). In anticipation of when you and others make mistakes – which will happen -- ensure that you have practices for offering an authentic apology which includes acknowledging mistakes, staying in relationship, taking responsibility for the harm you caused, making repairs, and taking steps to reduce and eliminate future harms are foundational to both interpersonal and organizational change.

Build solidarity

True anti-racist practice involves organizations working in coalition, refusing to exploit or misuse partnerships with less-resourced organizations, and taking collective action. Bohonos (2022) urges human

resource practitioners to align themselves with social movements in order to carve out spaces of resistance, learning, and solidarity in or around their workplace. In the past year alone, nonprofit human service workers have rallied for better wages and working conditions in five states including California, New York, Massachusetts, Minnesota, and Washington (Abers-Kimball 2023; Cohen 2023; McDede and Silvers 2022; Parrott 2022; Smith 1993). Advocates also emphasize the importance of requiring philanthropic organizations to make significant changes, including increasing funding to BIPOC-led organizations, more general operating grants, and greater emphasis on collaboration over competition and co-optation (Nagarajan and Faithful 2022). Finally, as we focus on improving the working conditions within organizations, we must not lose focus on the external injustices that require our attention (Diaminah et al. 2023). The community members most impacted by injustice are part of our organizational systems and need to be involved. Organizational change can benefit staff, build power, *and* move the organization closer to the goals of changing conditions, policies, and systems to work better for communities (Diaminah et al. 2023).

Take tangible action, remain accountable

All talk and no action? To avoid the failings of diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts, organizations must take concrete actions and remain **accountable** to the goals they set. Leaders need to work with staff to identify clear goals, build and sustain internal support, and monitor and communicate progress. At the same time, it is important to expand the organization's timeframe for reaching its goals (Bohonos and James-Gallaway 2022). True transformation is not found in a singular destination or metric but instead requires ongoing experimentation, learning, and action.

Resources for the work ahead

Fortunately, there is no shortage of resources designed to assist support individuals and groups working to achieve racial equity in their organizations. In addition to the sources cited above, the following resources may assist you and your colleagues as you work towards building an anti-racist organization:

- The website Racial Equity Tools (www.racialequitytools.com) offers a resource library with a wide range of tools, research, tips, curricula, and ideas for people who want to increase their understanding and to help those working for racial justice in systems, organizations, communities, and the culture at large.
- The Annie E. Casey Foundation offers an action guide to advancing and embracing racial equity and inclusion within organizations (<https://www.aecf.org/resources/race-equity-and-inclusion-action-guide>) and the Mind Trust’s equity toolkit directs resources to organizations at the developing, mid, and high stages of the work (<https://equitytoolkit.org>)
- The consulting firm NonprofitHR regularly surveys mission-driven organizations in North America and shares the results on their website (<https://www.nonprofithr.com/>). For example, their 2023 survey on Nonprofit Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, & Justice Practices provides insights into current diversity practices in organizations (<https://www.nonprofithr.com/knowledge-insights/>).
- The blogs NonprofitAF (<https://nonprofitaf.com/>) and Community Centric Fundraising (<https://communitycentricfundraising.org/>) use humor, interviews, essays, and podcasts to discuss the need for greater equity and justice in the sector and to advocate for specific shifts in policy and practice.
- Layla Saad’s workbook *Me and White Supremacy* (2020) helps readers understand their White privilege and participation in White supremacy, take steps to stop inflicting damage on people of color, and help other white people do better, too. Anneliese Singh’s *Racial Healing Handbook* (2019) offers practical tools for everyone to unlearn racist messages, fight for racial justice, and foster healing.
- In *Living a Feminist Life*, Author Sara Ahmed (2017) provides insight into the complexities of doing diversity work in organizations or institutions and offers advice for those who are pushing

to open spaces to those who have been historically excluded from them. Her blog continues the conversation (<https://feministkilljoys.com/>).

Conclusion

Nonprofits in the U.S. are challenged with the task of attracting and retaining employees who have the unique skills, experiences and perspectives needed to fill gaps, foster trust, innovate, create, advocate, and organize for greater equity and justice. Yet, nonprofits are not exempt from the social forces that reproduce and sustain inequity and injustice. Nonprofit human resource practices have been criticized for perpetuating racial disparities in hiring, compensation, climate, promotion, and retention. Despite many public pledges to increase diversity, equity and inclusion in the sector, these disparities persist, impacting the experiences of staff and hampering their ability to achieve their organizations' missions.

Critical race theory encourages us to acknowledge the inequities that persist within and between nonprofit organizations, and to uncover the social and institutional structures that reinforce these arrangements. The traditional human resource practices adopted by many nonprofits overemphasize efficiency and compliance over equity, empathy, and respect. A focus on the interests of elite philanthropy encourages austerity and discourages investment in the wages and benefits provided to staff. Many organizations continue to uncritically equate the ideal nonprofit worker with Whiteness and masculinity. The ability of organizations to address these issues is hampered by colorblindness and interest convergence. The counter-stories of people of color in the sector illuminate the harms they have faced by colleagues, supervisors, and donors, and detail the extensive social and emotional labor that they have contributed to their organizations, often at great personal expense.

Fortunately, many scholars and practitioners have developed strategies for redressing racism in the nonprofit system. The suggestions they offer, based on their values, persistence, and lessons learned, may assist you to assess the state of your organizations, commit to the work, and take concrete action that leads to real change in policies and practices. While there is no singular pathway to organizational transformation, we do know which principles and behaviors support deep equity work including: sharing

the responsibility, remaining open to learning-- and unlearning; developing a shared analysis of racism and other forms of oppression; generating open and honest conversations; and staying engaged over the long term. Throughout, organizational change efforts that prioritize solidarity with communities, colleagues and partners will be positioned to advocate for much needed changes to the institutions and systems that continue to perpetuate injustice.

Discussion Questions:

1. Racial injustice persists in and between nonprofit organizations, despite many pledges to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion in the sector. What are the potential implications for this disconnection?
2. This chapter draws from history to discuss core concepts like race, critical race theory, racial capitalism, and human resources development. What are the benefits of understanding these concepts and history as we analyze contemporary nonprofit practice?
3. What is the 'critical standpoint' that you can bring to your work? How have you been socialized in terms of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and ability? What messages have you learned (or unlearned)? What do you still want to learn about the experiences who have been socialized differently from you?
4. Consider the key critical race concepts discussed in the chapter. What are leadership skills and practices that are needed to assist organizations to address colorblindness, interrupt interest convergence, and honor the counter-stories of staff, constituents, and other stakeholders in the nonprofit context?
5. Revisit the suggestions for building more equitable, anti-racist nonprofit organizations. Which of these steps push your thinking? Search and locate at least one additional resource that enhances your understanding and may assist you to shift your practice.

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