Getting Past the Bumpiness™: White Fragility and Skin Color

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Disparities in Minnesota

Getting Past the Bumpiness™: White Fragility and Skin Color Legal Profession

America is undergoing a seismic shift in how we think of people who are "Other," particularly as "Otherness" relates to skin color, socio-economic class/disparities, and country of origin. It's important that we collectively address this shift and talk about America's past of denying people of color (other than people of the white color) equal treatment and opportunities. However, because we are human, we're often fearful of impacting sensitivities, making people "uncomfortable," and "creating controversy."

How can we begin the exceedingly difficult but necessary conversation around skin color? What are the strategies that work and which ones fail? And for the legal community (broadly defined)—which touches people from all backgrounds—how can we reduce or eliminate skin-color-based disparities that affect clients, colleagues, and the general public?

With this introductory training, Ellen (Ellie) Krug seeks to offer some tips and ideas on this incredibly important topic. (Note: Due to time constraints, this training focuses on Black humans only and isn't intended to address racism/historical marginalization directed at American Indians/Indigenous people or to persons of Asian, Latino, or other identities.)

I. Ground Rules

- This is a judgment-free zone. Shaming or guilt are not at all intended.
- Respect for other humans is paramount.
- Understand that *all will be uncomfortable.*
- We can only grow through discomfort; it's not working to create lasting change from our Barcaloungers.
- **This isn't at all about good or bad people; rather, it's about understanding historical and present-day frameworks and then working to interrupt a skin color-dominated system.**
- This isn't a gripe session. It's also not a political rally but certainly, it's impossible to ignore what's happening in American culture and politics now.
- Talking about skin color/effects is an incremental process; people must be brought along. You must bring yourself along.
- Unlike with every other training, I can't use humor here. The topic's too serious.

II. Words and Phrases

- **Prejudice:** Brain-based prejudgment about a human because of a group that he/she/they represent. Includes stereotypes and attitudes based on the absence of, or very limited experience with, that "Other" human's group.
- **Discrimination:** Action-based prejudice—an event or system of events.

- **Racism:** A structure—not an event. When a group's collective prejudice is backed by the power of the state or an institution, racism arises. Based on an ideology, with ideas/themes reinforced by structural systems (political, religious, social). While any human regardless of skin color can discriminate, only white-color people can engage in racism because they control the levers of power.

- **Structural Racism:** Because *Merriam-Webster* is still endeavoring to provide a good definition of structural or systemic racism, I'm going to do my best to come up with my own working definition, to wit: "Structural or systemic racism is a society's collection of laws, policies, practices, and expectations that either explicitly or implicitly favor white-color skin and where other skin colors are avoided or suppressed, sometimes violently. Examples would include Jim Crow laws, police targeting of nonwhite persons, redlining in real estate and credit, school discipline practices that disproportionately affect children of color, voter suppression, and regimented employment barriers that fail to take into account meaningful and relevant life experiences and learning. Additionally, it includes messaging via various means that you are lesser if not white in color."

- **Racial Ideology:** The narrative that people don't succeed because they aren't naturally capable, or don't work hard enough, or aren't deserving or grateful, or any other marginalizing thought process based on belief rather than fact or true familiarity.

- **Race:** An artificial, social construct used by white-color people to perpetuate the myth that whites are superior to humans of other skin colors. There is no biological difference between humans to support the construct of separate "races."

- **White Supremacy:** The political, religious, and social systems that make white-colored skin the standard or norm while teaching directly or implicitly that people of any other skin color are deviations.

- **White Fragility:** The reaction of most white-color people to discussions around race; the fragility can manifest in the form of anger, fear, crying or escapism. Attributable to white-color people wanting to immediately prove they aren't "racist" or aren't beneficiaries of white supremacy. Because white-color people are not conditioned to consider their skin color on a day-to-day basis, they lack the grit or resiliency to talk about race.

- **White Privilege:** The collection of advantages that benefit white-color humans, which for the most part, they do not consciously consider or understand. Alternatively stated: white privilege is the absence of inconvenience or impairment or challenges such that white-color people don't even notice the privilege. Examples include experiencing less police stops (compared to black or brown people) and having greater access to job interviews because of a "normal" name compared to one that sounds Black or Brown. (See bibliography below for detailed articles on white privilege.) Having white privilege doesn't mean that you didn't work hard or haven't suffered life challenges—it's just that your skin color wasn't the reason for those life challenges.

- **BIPOC:** Contemporary term for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.

III. **Critical Concepts Underlying the Conversation**

- **Compassionate Conversations:** To get past the effects of skin color, we need to allow people to ask questions that may be awkward, ignorant, or unintentionally traumatizing. On the other hand, this is an emotional topic and humans who've historically suffered from a white-dominated society have strong emotions around avoiding additional marginalization. We all must act with understanding and compassion toward each other as we have these conversations.
- **Safe Space:** The goal is to create a safe space for those who are learning and for those who have been marginalized. This may require exercising allyship for participants from marginalized communities—by recognizing that words can be hurtful and by checking in to see how they are doing.
- **Grace:** Not the religious variety, but instead the kind of grace that relieves others (and one's self) from judgment. We cannot discuss the effects of skin color without according everyone in the room some grace. Providing grace will be difficult for some people; this is an ultimate, aspirational goal.
- **Systems/Systemic vs. Individual:** White supremacy is a system built on the idea that there are separate "races," with one "race" (white-color humans) being more able, more intelligent, and exceptional compared to other "races." America was founded on and continues to exist under such a system. Individual actions, while well-intentioned, cannot repulse the effect of race-based systems; only systemic change can do that.
- **Cognitive Dissonance:** Feelings of discomfort that result when your beliefs run counter to your behaviors and/or when new information is presented which challenges your beliefs. People tend to seek consistency in their attitudes and perceptions, so when what you hold true is challenged or what you do doesn't jibe with what you think, something must change in order to eliminate or reduce the dissonance. A classic example of this is "explaining something away." Another example is believing that someone is inferior to one's self as a way of justifying marginalizing behavior toward that person. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cognitive_dissonance
- **Complicated/Complex:** The truths around white supremacy and racism are complex and complicated. One doesn't have to master every nuance to understand that the system has been rigged in favor of white-color humans.
- **The Traumatic Weight of History:** Many white-color people don't understand how historical marginalization weighs on Black Americans and others. Throw in that the marginalization continues to today, and things weigh on you to the point that it doesn't take much for emotional wellbeing to unravel. Remember the phrase, **"THINGS WEIGHING ON YOU."** Remember also that trauma (the emotional kind) adds up. **We all experience trauma, but many humans react to it differently and not all humans experience historical trauma.**
- **Intent vs. Impact:** As we engage in conversations around skin color, whitism and structural racism, good intent doesn't obviate the impact of hurtful words or actions. Black, Brown, and Indigenous people may react to certain statements or actions differently than white-color people. It's important that the impact of those words or actions be acknowledged.

IV.   Historical Understandings—Limited and Very Abbreviated

There has never been the equivalent of a national reconciliation around slavery, dislocation/genocide of Native Americans, Jim Crow/segregation, lynching, or anything else about how America used humans who lacked free will to build the country. (But, see below—my call for MN to establish a Truth & Reconciliation Commission.) Here are some key historical facts to bear in mind:

- 1492-onward: Caucasian-normative Europeans seek to "explore" and "conquer" the New World filled with Brown and Indigenous people. Columbus brought enslaved Indigenous people back to Spain.
- Through violence, European-originated diseases, slavery, and hunger/starvation, millions of Indigenous people in the Americas died. The people perpetrating this were white-color humans seeking to build a white-based, Christian-only society.
- 1619: Slavery introduced into North America in what would become the state of Virginia; nearly 600,000 Africans were enslaved in the U.S.; by 1860, there were more than 4 million enslaved people in the United States. All these people were of skin colors other than white.
- 1787: The United States Constitution recognizes the institution of slavery and confers inferior status on enslaved humans with a compromise that counts each enslaved human as three-fifths of a person. Importation of enslaved humans was permitted until 1808; thereafter, it was legal to trade enslaved humans born or living the U.S. The Civil War ended this.
- Enslaved humans were treated as property; enslavers/"owners" were taxed for each enslaved person in their "possession." White-color people bought and sold black/brown-skin color humans—in the 1850's an enslaved human was worth $1500-$3000 (2020 values: $49,000-$98,000); white-color humans created wealth simply from the trade of enslaved humans.
- 1857:   Dred Scott Supreme Court decision embodied the rule that Black humans were not entitled to the rights and benefits of the U.S. Constitution.
- 1861-65: Civil War fought with the South rejecting the North's efforts to abolish slavery/North's refusal to permit slavery in westward expansion states.
- June 19, 1865 ("Juneteenth"): the last bastion of slavery is eliminated when Union troops reached Galveston, Texas to impose rule of law/enforce the Emancipation Proclamation (which was issued January 1, 1863).
- July 1866: Klux Klux Klan founded in Tennessee by Confederate Army veterans, signaling the beginning of organized terror against newly freed Black Americans.
- 1865-1877: Reconstruction is enforced in the South; Black men vote and elect many Black state and federal legislators.
- 1862-onward: Homestead Act becomes law, spurring mass migration to far Midwest and West where homesteaders could earn 160 acres of land. Open only to white-color people. Resulted in the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Indigenous people.
- 1877: Reconstruction abandoned with the withdrawal of federal troops from the South, ending the political and social progress of Black Southerners.

- 1877-1955: More than 4,000 Black humans lynched or otherwise murdered in 20 states. This includes the lynching of three Black circus workers in Duluth MN in June 1920.
- 1896: <u>Plessy v. Ferguson</u> Supreme Court decision holding that "separate but equal" racial segregation was constitutional, thereby institutionalizing a white-power structure in the South the next 60+ years.
- By the late 1890s, all Southern states had had imposed laws limiting the voting rights of Black citizens. In 1896, Louisiana had 130K Black voters registered; by 1904, only 1,342 Black voters were registered.
- Violent intimidation of Blacks (1919 Chicago race riot; 1921 destruction of "Black Wall Street" in Tulsa; 1943 Detroit) occurs through to the early 1960s.
- 1917-18; 1941-45: Segregation of U.S. armed forces WWI and WWII.
- 1910-1970s: Restrictive racial covenants and redlining used to segregate Minneapolis and other Minnesota cities, resulting in the exclusion of Black homeowners from white-color residential neighborhoods.
- 19402-late 1960s: Federal Housing Administration (FHA) purposely segregates neighborhoods via lending practices/denies mortgages to Black loan applicants seeking to live in newly created/expanding suburbs.
- 1944: G.I. Bill created, secedes control of benefits to states, which perpetuates segregation/discrimination; Black vets can't access FHA mortgage benefits.
- 1955: Emmitt Till, a 14-year-old Black teen from Chicago, who was visiting his grandparents in Mooney, MS, was lynched on a false claim of disrespecting a white-color woman.
- 1960-1965: Southern pushback against Freedom Riders and voter registration.
- August 1963: March on Washington; Dr. King's "I Have a Dream Speech."
- 1964: Three civil rights workers (two white-color, one Black) murdered in Neshoba County, Mississippi.
- 1964-65: Voting Rights Act enacted; rate of Black voting skyrockets.
- March 1965, Selma Alabama march for voting rights, John Lewis and others beaten at the Edmund Pettus Bridge.
- 1963, 1968: Murder of most famous Black American activists (Medgar Evers, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.) by white-color men.
- April 1990 *Time Magazine* article about America becoming a minority-majority country in 21st century.
- 2001: 9/11 attacks. Public marginalizing of Muslims (many of whom have darker skin colors) begins in earnest and continues to the present.
- 2004: The idea that Barak Obama wasn't born in the United States originates with white-color humans; by the 2008 presidential campaign, "birtherism" is a political weapon.
- 2008: first Black President of the United States.
- Sept. 9, 2009: white-color South Carolina Congressman Joe Wilson yells, "You lie" to Barak Obama during a joint session of Congress about the Affordable Care Act. This was an exceptional act of public disrespect.
- 2013: The U.S. Supreme Court in *Shelby County v. Holder* guts a key provision of the 1964 Civil Rights Act that required many Southern states to obtain federal preclearance for any new election voting laws. The result: voter suppression via legislative enactments and other mechanisms, adversely impacting Black and Latinx communities' voting opportunities.

- Feb. 2020: In his State of the Union address, President Trump uses the theme of "how the West was won" to reinforce (white) American exceptionalism.
- May 2020: The police-involved killing of George Floyd spawns rage across America, dramatically changing the conversation around racism and the need for real change. Will real change happen?

V.   Strategies for Expected Responses

- "<u>What you just said [or did] made me feel uncomfortable</u>": Use this response when you're at a loss for what else to say. In most instances, these simple words will cause whoever said or did the offensive thing/action to stop.
- "I can't be prejudiced because don't see color." Thought: This reflects a lack of understanding that all of America is grounded in the color of one's skin; the statement also ignores the struggles that nonwhite people encounter. Strategy: Remind the speaker that it's impossible to not see color.
- "I've got a best friend who's Black. I don't have any prejudice." Thought: This completely ignores structural racism/white supremacy and the concept of exceptionalism—"my Black friend thinks I'm not racist, so I must not be." Ask how often the speaker has ever talked to his Black friend about what it's like for the friend to live in a white-dominated society.
- "All of this happened before I was born. Why do I have to deal with this?" Thought: You are the beneficiary of a system that for hundreds of years oppressed people with skin color other than white; at the very least recognize this. Even more, please work to level the playing field for everyone, not just for white-color people.
- Sam says, "Joe over in accounts payable has a real problem with anyone who's not white. How do I talk to him about his racism?" Thought: This presupposes that Sam isn't also biased; the fact is, everyone is biased to some degree and all white-color people benefit from a system of white supremacy. The starting point would be for Sam to admit his biases to Joe and to share about how he's coming along on understanding the rigged system. Sam might consider inviting Joe to accompany him on the journey as they both read up about the historical marginalization of people of color.
- "I get that Black people want equality, but at what point is it enough?" Thought: This statement ignores the historical reality that Black Americans started out with a deficit re: accumulating wealth, inferior education systems, redlining to poorer neighborhoods, etc. It will take decades of "wokeness" by white-color Americans to make the system more equitable.
- "Why are people so sensitive? I just want to be able to joke around about skin color or cultural heritage and don't mean anything by it." Thought: At this time in America, people of color rightfully are sensitive about any comments made by white-color people. If your family lineage had included enslaved persons or victims of genocide, likely you too would be sensitive!
- "My life was hard, and it sure didn't feel like we were privileged." Thought: White privilege doesn't mean that you've not endured difficulties. It simply means that your skin color wasn't a reason for those difficulties.
- "Not all cops are bad." Thought: Of course, this is true; however, with George Floyd we watched as three cops stood by failing to intervene. The system is

broken when law enforcement power dynamics and contempt for certain lives based on skin color prevent police officers from acting with compassion.

- Remember the analogy to the house with a fractured foundation—quick fix patches won't work. Instead, it's necessary to jack the house up and jackhammer out the foundation. Only after we pour in a new, solid foundation will the house stand properly for the ages. Failing to do this hard, corrective work means the house will continue to tilt, then teeter, to the ground. A new foundation begins with a national reconciliation/discussion around skin color and white supremacy.

VI.   Leadership Considerations

- **Allyship:** This is a particularly difficult area for white-color organizational leaders who not only have to educate themselves about their own biases but who also need to ensure that team members who are Black, Indigenous or persons of color (BIPOC) are protected and heard. "Ally" is a status; "Allyship" is action.
- **Legal Workplace Leaders** must continually listen to what is being said and consider how that's affecting BIPOC team members. Often, leaders must push back on comments; at the same time, they need to check in on BIPOC team members: "I wonder how your words just made our colleagues who are BIPOC feel?" "I want to check in to see how our team members of color are doing in this conversation."
- **Trust: It is critical**. A leader will lose the trust of BIPOC team members if the leader fails to protect them. It's a long road back to regaining trust.
- **Mistakes and Apology.** Leaders will inevitably make mistakes; when that occurs, they must timely apologize/own the mistake. It must be a genuine apology (not an "Oh, I got caught" apology).
- **Intent vs. Impact.** Leaders must always be mindful of the fact that good intent doesn't negate damaging impact.
- **Randomness:** Marginalization is often random and can't be planned for. Therefore, you must train, train, train.
- **Where Are All the Managers?** It's not uncommon for many managers to skip this or other D&I trainings, which sends a horrible message to BIPOC and white-color allies. Leaders must require all managers be trained.
- **Regular and Direct:** Leadership in this field requires building and maintaining a culture that values all team members. Leaders must talk about inclusivity/the effects of whiteness on a regular basis and with great frankness. The days of ignoring or tiptoeing around this are over.
- **Protecting Jackie (or Julie) Robinson:** Many organizations have just one or two people of color (or from other marginalized communities, like persons with visible disabilities); I refer to these folks as "Jackie Robinson" (of "Julie Robinson") because just like the ball player, they're the "first" of their kind in the organization. Don't assume all is going well for them; reach out to these team members and ask, "How are things going?" "Please trust me with sharing about challenges you've encountered; I want to support and protect you."

VII.   Interrupting Racism—Generally

- Develop a "questioning lens" where you ask: "What are the underlying historical and societal forces at work to create a particular disparity (e.g.

redlining)? How did we get here? How much longer am I going to be silent about it? How did white-color people, including me or my ancestors, benefit?

- Speak up about those underlying historical and societal forces.
- We need to start a national conversation about how people of color other than of the white color have been historically treated in America. We cannot get past our skin color problems without such a commission/national conversation. In Minnesota, support my call for the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission; go to "Projects" at elliekrug.com/read here: https://elliekrug.files.wordpress.com/2020/05/call-for-truth-and-reconciliation-commission.pdf
- Along with that national conversation will come the subject of reparations for the historical marginalization of enslaved humans and their descendants. Read more here: https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/06/24/magazine/reparations-slavery.html?referringSource=articleShare
- Real structural change will cost—increased taxes, burdens on time and resources, becoming "uncomfortable." The payoff is a better America.
- Be aware of background data such as the percentage of people of color other than the white color in MN and your community/county. Ask, "Are the people in this room representative of the state relative to diversity? Representative of our community?"
- Consider this Ten Point Plan for how to radically change the Diversity & Inclusion Landscape in MN; go to "Projects" at elliekrug.com/read here: https://elliekrug.files.wordpress.com/2020/05/ten-point-plan-for-changing-the-diversity-and-inclusion-landscape-5.27.20-1.pdf
- Challenge the status quo by being aware and asking questions:

  ➢ Why does Minnesota have one of the largest education-achievement gaps between white-color students and students of color other than white?
    - Obtain data from your local school system re: discipline rates of students according to skin color (if such data do not exist, demand that it be collected).
    - Press local school districts to hire more Black or Brown educators/administrators.
    - Actively support groups seeking to eliminate the achievement gap in MN (https://www.ciresiwalburnfoundation.org/)
    - Hold local elected officials accountable.
  ➢ Why does MN have one of the largest wage/income gaps between white-color workers and workers of other colors? (http://www.citypages.com/news/minnesota-still-has-some-of-the-worst-racial-disparities-in-the-nation/504390741)
    - Demand that governmental entities conduct wage gap analyses (based on skin color, age, gender, and disability status) and hold those entities accountable to eliminate the gaps.
    - Press governmental entities to insist that contractors eliminate wage gaps and employ workforces consistent with color percentages within the community.

- Ask yourself as you pass a construction site or worksite: "How many of the people I'm seeing have a skin color other than white?"
  For all-white work forces, call out the contractor and the company/governmental entity that hired the contractor.
- If your company uses vendors, ask whether they are reflective of the community vis-à-vis skin color percentages? Identify minority-owned vendors and give them an opportunity to do business with your company. Share minority vendor information with others.

➢ Why does Minnesota's business community often not reflect the skin color proportions of the state? Or that of some communities where a business is situated?

- Do you work for an all-white business? Why is that the case in 2020? Challenge culture leaders over this.
- Reject the argument, "There are no qualified candidates." This is unacceptable in 2020; think differently about how to recruit (reach out to Historically Black Colleges; post job listings in Black churches and local papers (see https://spokesman-recorder.com/)).
- Change your business culture. By 2035 (at the latest), the Twin Cities will be minority-majority. Our business community will suffer if it's not more diverse and welcoming by then. Gather the data and then use it to change minds; if you can't do that, vote with your feet, and work somewhere else.

VIII. Interrupting Racism—Legal Profession

- Be aware of/share about the studies that show how skin color (and other things, like gender) impacts legal profession interactions--https://www.americanbar.org/news/abanews/aba-news-archives/2018/09/new-study-finds-gender-and-racial-bias-endemic-in-legal-professi1/
- Understand that confirmation bias is real in the legal profession--https://blogs.findlaw.com/greedy_associates/2014/04/confirmation-bias-against-black-associates-shown-in-memo-study.html
- Not every legal workplace mentor or manager is qualified to mentor to BIPOC attorneys. Evaluate mentors/managers on their understanding about unconscious bias, human inclusivity, and communication skills. Bravely choose the proper mentors/managers.
- Create a reverse-mentoring program that pairs a BIPOC-identifying attorney or support colleague with a white-color mentor. Yes, this is time intensive, but the payoffs can be immense.
- Require anti-bias training (in one form or another) repeatedly throughout the year. Track team member participation and persist in getting the stragglers to participate.
- Make all team members accountable for their behavior and attitudes in the workplace, courtroom, country club and on social media. This accountability should be included in yearly evaluations and in compensation considerations.
- Every legal workplace should have a written Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Plan. The plan should be created with the assistance of all strata of team members and

it should be a "living" document—meaning that at least twice a year, you revisit the plan to determine if the organization if fulfilling its goals and aspirations; if not, make adjustments.

- Understand that legal workplace culture is influenced by those in power; in the private sector, power comes from client lists/rainmaking. In the corporate sector, power may come from those who are good a politics or longevity. (All of the preceding are broad generalizations; certainly legal skillsets help to dictate who rises to the level of culture leader.) Workplace culture toward BIPOC opportunities/success (and the opportunities or success of anyone else who is considered "Other") is set by culture leaders. Bravely call out culture leaders who don't get it.
- An inclusive legal workplace comes about only when culture leaders repeatedly message and model that inclusivity/anti-racism are important.
- Use imagination to recruit BIPOC legal professionals and support colleagues; no longer is the excuse, "We can't find 'them'" acceptable.

IX.   Other Things You Can Do to Fix Things in America

- Create a coalition through your workplace, religious/spiritual organization, social clubs, or other networks to address systemic racism/marginalization within those organizations.
- Use the same coalition to tackle systemic racism/marginalization in your local government (city administration, police and fire departments, other gov't agencies) and schools. Ask the hard questions identified above, starting with (1) "how many of 'them' are represented?" and (2) "where are "they" within the organization?"
- Create or locate a list of locally-owned BIPOC businesses and use them—for catering, printing services, IT, janitorial. Advertise/support local BIPOC publications; see the *Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder*: https://spokesman-recorder.com/
- Become a mentor/organize a mentoring program where you and others mentor to BIPOC at-risk youth. Adopt a class of at-risk youth and support them as they make their way toward college. Yes, it's time-intensive but the rewards are incalculable. See https://www.bigstwincities.org/
- Read up, volunteer for, and support organizations engaged in "frontline work" that are deconstructing systemic racism. Find organizations that are truly making a difference and replicate them. **Examples of how to get things right:** Joyce Preschool (50% non-English-speaking families)—100% of students are pre-K ready https://www.joycepreschool.org/; and the Jeremiah Program, which comprehensively bootstraps women with children into college and advanced degrees, changing their trajectory https://jeremiahprogram.org/ .
- Lean into tough conversations with relatives, friends, and neighbors who are afraid to deal with this subject. Remember, this is a "little bites" process and one doesn't need to "convert" another person. Often, people will open their minds just with being asked a question or with you saying, "You know, I attended this very interesting training the other day…" See also for tips on how to talk about racism and white privilege: https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/2020/07/06/how-to-guide-talk-racism-white-privilege-with-family-friends/3278514001/
- Pay attention. Be alert to public incidents where BIPOC or others from marginalized communities are the subject of comments or actions that reflect one's prejudice.

Stand up for those people; if you're afraid to do that, at least let the person being marginalized know that you care about them

- Recommend to everyone you know that they take this or a similar training (I'm not the only trainer on the topic by a long shot). Eventually, every white-color adult will need to go through such training.
- Advocate for Black, Brown, Indigenous people, and other persons of color to be on the governing boards of organizations—nonprofits, community boards, governmental oversight committees.
- Host conversations in your organization or community, with the intent to get to know anyone who is "Other" by virtue of skin color, religion, LGBTQ status, disability status, or anything else that we use to separate us. Here are some prompts (several are courtesy of Michael Fosberg, author of *Incognito: An American Odyssey of Race and Self Discovery)*:
  - ➤ Tell us two hobbies you engage in.
  - ➤ Who had a great influence on you or in your life?
  - ➤ Tell us about a turning point in your life.
  - ➤ Name something that you are grateful for.
  - ➤ What is your earliest race-related memory?
  - ➤ Name an "ah ha" moment in your life.

X.   Don't Despair—Real, Lasting Change is Possible

- It's easy to fall into the trap of thinking that the hurdles are overwhelming and that we'll never be able to get past our differences around skin color, country of origin, socioeconomic class and the other things that separate us; however, *we have made progress since 1964 and the Civil Right Act.* It's just that the progress has not been quick or broad enough.
- We need to focus on our common values as Americans. We have four core things in common (regardless of skin color): (a) the desire for our children to succeed; (b) the desire to be free of physical or emotional violence; (c) the desire to love and be loved; and (d) the desire for twenty minutes of peace. (I call these "The Four Commonalities.") If we can focus on our commonalities, we can get past the hurdles that seem so daunting.
- We also need to use our imagination and think boldly. Examples:
  - ➤ In August 2020, Hormel Foods announced a program to pay for two years of college for every dependent of a Hormel employee. https://www.startribune.com/hormel-offers-two-year-college-benefit-to-employees-children/572216402/
  - ➤ For Labor Day 2020, Red Wing Shoes' 500+ retail stores became job centers to promote local jobs. They did this in collaboration with 50 other major employers. https://www.startribune.com/red-wing-shoes-stores-to-become-job-centers-on-labor-day/572296162/
- Remember our good empathetic hearts. I—a transgender woman who doesn't "pass" completely as female because of my voice—have spoken across the country in Red, Blue and "Bernie" communities/states. Consistently, my message of empathy and compassion for others has been uniformly affirmed. We are all Americans/wannabe Americans and we can get to a place of equality if we exercise our empathetic hearts and allow ourselves to be vulnerable.

XI.   Bibliography—Very Limited

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My standing offer: any human can contact me relative to gender or sexual identity issues or anything else related to surviving the Human Condition. I'm a good listener and willing to meet with anyone in a public place or speak on the telephone for up to an hour. This is a real offer. Email: elliejkrug@gmail.com

The work to change America for the better begins with each of us individually. If we're brave, persistent, and kind to one another, we will get there!

Finally, if you are in the choir, please sing, sing, sing! Share that others need to receive training on white fragility/skin color/society's historical emphasis on whiteness. Whether the training is with me or with someone else, it's important that all white-color Americans be educated.

Please have compassion for yourself and for others!

ellie

Disparities in Minnesota

The death of George Floyd and subsequent protests/unrest in the Twin Cities (and across America) have reinforced that when it comes to skin color (and other things like cultural backgrounds or country of origin), all is not equal in Minnesota (or America). This is the case despite Minnesota being "first" or near the top of many critical markers—education, wages, even happiness.

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When you dig into the data, the disparities become glaring. This talk isn't intended to shame anyone about those disparities, nor is it intended to make anyone feel guilty about being white in color. Rather, I believe that most people want to do the right thing; it's just that most aren't aware of how bad the skin color-based differences are and many don't have any idea of how to work for concrete, positive change.

With this talk, I seek to shed some light on the gravity of the problem and offer some ideas on how to fix things.

I.   Background Basics

- Federal Poverty Guidelines—the official definition of "poor" in America.
    - $12,760 single person; $26,200 for a family of four (2020).
    - Almost all gov't benefits flow from where one sits relative to the poverty guidelines.
    - Child poverty rate in the U.S. is 16% of all children younger than 18 (2018); 32% of Black children live in poverty (2018).
- Federal Minimum Wage: $7.25/hr. This hasn't increased since July 2009.
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- Average rent for 2-bedroom apt. Minneapolis: $1847/mo. (2019).
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- Minnesota Population (2016): 5.523 million.
    - 81.3% White alone; 18.7% All Other Races.

- Twin Cities Metro Population (2016): 2,978,822
  - White alone: 74.3%
  - Black: 8.9%
  - Latinx: 6.1%
  - Asian/Pacific Islander: 7.2%

II.   Disparities—Education—Minnesota

- 3rd Grade Reading Achievement—Meeting or Exceeding Standards (2019)
  - White (Non-Hispanic): 63.7%   (66.9% in 2014)
  - Children of Color: 38.5 %   (39% in 2014)
  - Lower Income children (185% FPG): 35.5%   (40.1% in 2015)
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III.   Disparities—Wages/Income—Twin Cities Metro

- Wages/Median Household Income (per MNDEED in 2016):
  - White alone: $76,632
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ellen krug
writer, lawyer, human

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