Framing Issues with a Racial Equity Lens

Facilitator’s Guide

Contributor: Terry Keleher, The Applied Research Center (ARC)

Belief systems, which inform policy and law, can contribute to and perpetuate injustice. This injustice rests on unconscious and conscious beliefs about who matters in society and who does not. In order to make right what is inherently wrong, collective action is required. This learning module is based on the work of the Applied Research Center, a thirty-year-old racial justice think tank that uses media, research and activism to promote solutions. This module provides examples of how injustice is perpetuated through the media and court systems. By working with art, film clips and other activities participants will learn the importance of framing an issue with a racial equity lens and practice it.

The purpose of Framing Issues with a Racial Equity Lens module is:

● To understand the power of ‘framing’
● To learn how ‘re-framing’ is an important tool for building effective strategies for racial equity and change
● To explore how media coverage and public discourse can be shifted to impact outcomes

Module Length: 6 hours, broken into Parts 1 & 2, for 1-hour please do sections 1 and 3

Context/Target Audience:

The Framing Issues with a Racial Equity Lens module is geared toward educational institutions—professors, teachers, and students, as well as those who work in the arenas of non-profit, faith-based organizations, and government, and also community organizers and activists.

The module is broken into sections that are ideally implemented in order, with the community building first, the main lesson plan in the middle, then artistic production or case studies, and ending with a closing reflection.

Materials: laptop with Internet access, projector, screen or large monitor, speakers, printed handouts for each section

Facilitator, please download the Framing PowerPoint and be sure to use presentation mode to access all hyper links.

Handouts are at the end of the Facilitator’s Guide.
SECTION 1: Half Lies/Half Truths

Learning Goal:

- To understand that assumptions can influence our interpretation of any story

Estimated Time: 15 minutes

This community-building exercise asks participants to respond to a short story in an effort to articulate how leaving out significant details of a story creates misunderstanding (as in this case) and, oftentimes, injustice.

Instructions: Welcome your group. Ask someone to read the following story:

Once there was a man who was known in his town for creating confusion and drama wherever he went. He seemed to enjoy stirring up trouble...often. One day, he was visiting his newly married cousin. She was so happy! All she could talk about was how wonderful her husband was; how perfect he was; how amazing he was. She waxed on and on and finally noticed that her cousin was just staring at the floor. “What’s the matter?” she asked. He replied, “Well, I don’t know how to tell you this.” “What?” she said. “Oh, nothing,” said her cousin, who was looking very sad. She pressured him to tell her what was on his mind, but he just kept shaking his head. Finally, she exploded with anger and threatened to throw him out of her house. The man apologized and then said, “Yesterday, I saw your husband walking down the street with his arm around another woman. They didn’t see me, and I saw him kiss her.” At first she didn’t believe what her cousin was saying, but he convinced her that he was telling the truth. She was devastated and began to cry. Her cousin left and, well, the damage was done. Too bad her cousin the troublemaker didn’t tell say that the woman her husband was kissing was his mother.

Reflection/Discussion in triad:

Ask participants to think of at least one example where omission of information has changed the meaning of the story. For example, they might think about a story of which they have firsthand knowledge (like how children might describe an argument at school). Or, they may want to work with something from current events or history—how something has been presented within educational systems where pertinent information has been omitted, and how that informs perceptions. They may see how those limited perceptions have directed policy and/or law (e.g. history lessons as they are taught in school in terms of what is included and what is omitted).

After groups have reflected, ask a few of them to share their thoughts.
SECTION 2: Historical and Political Framing Through Art

Learning Goals:
- To begin to examine unspoken assumptions that influence how we understand
- To see how art can be used as a tool to re-frame issues and support justice

Estimated Time: 40 minutes

Instructions: Read ‘What is Framing?’ below:

**What is Framing?**
A frame, or “frame of reference”, is complex and always includes unquestioned beliefs and values that are informed by history and culture. We use all of this to infer meaning. If any part of that frame is changed (hence “re-framing”), then the meaning that is inferred may change.

Watch the video “Kerry James Marshall on Completing the Picture of Our Founding Fathers” and listen to Marshall describe his work. How does this art interrupt power by insisting on showing the entire story?

http://www.sfmoma.org/explore/multimedia/videos/350

**Reflection/Discussion Questions in groups of three or four:**
1. How do you respond to the fact that the history we are taught is incomplete? Do you believe it may be intentional?
2. What are some other examples of historical omissions?
3. Why do you think this may be so? Who benefits? Who does not?
SECTION 3: Framing an Issue with a Racial Equity Lens

Learning Goals:

- To understand how ‘re-framing’ issues with a racial equity lens can significantly change an outcome
- To learn how ‘re-framing’ is an important tool for building effective strategies for change
- To discover how media coverage and public discourse can be shifted to impact outcomes for racial justice

Estimated Time: 40 minutes

Watch the Video: Talking The Walk: Media and Race in the Campaign to Free Moreno & Pacheco (14 min.)

Instructions: Watch the video.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=QXveM3sWb0g

Discuss the video as a group using the discussion questions that follow:

1. What are your initial reflections on what you just saw?
2. How was the issue framed or re-framed by the community?
3. What difference did it make to use a race frame (naming and challenging the racism)?
4. What steps did the organizations take to highlight racism?
5. What institutions or power-holders were targeted by the community group and why?
6. What change resulted? At the institutional level? At the personal level?

Further Reading (Optional): Print out the article, “Talking Race to the Media” by Hunter Cutting
Share the article about the story featured in the video, so that participants can remember and refer back to some of the key lessons.
SECTION 4: Re-framing the Written and Unwritten Rules of History, Policy, and Law

Learning Goals:

- To learn and understand why frames are important vehicles to counteract negative messages
- To engage in re-framing an issue through a racial equity lens

Estimated Time: 2-3 hours

(This workshop consists of sub-sets of reading, journaling, dialogue, and the practice of re-framing using media images and video.)

Handouts:

1. Media Images and Framing
2. How Media Images Reinforce Frames
3. Excerpt from *Between Barack and a Hard Place: Racism and White Denial in the Age of Obama* by Tim Wise
4. ARC's Name It! Frame It! and Explain It!
5. ARC’s Racial Justice Framing Worksheet

4a. Framing & Racism

Estimated Time: 10 minutes

Materials: *Media Images and Framing & How Media Images Reinforce Frames*

Instructions: Read the following text in small groups:

Why are frames important?

The same issue can be described and explained through very different stories. The version of the story most widely told and believed becomes the dominant frame. The dominant frame shapes how problems are defined and what solutions are considered. We must often create an alternative frame—also known as re-framing. Re-framing conveys social justice values and points to equitable solutions. It’s best to avoid using the terms of an opposing frame, so as not to reinforce it. Use your own terms instead. Dominant frames such as individualism, competition, and meritocracy can be counteracted with frames such as collective good, linked fate, and shared prosperity. Personal responsibility or individual blame can be shifted to institutional accountability or shared responsibility. Fear-based frames can be shifted to frames that highlight hope, love, and unity.

Many prevailing issue frames reinforce racism. Often the racism is implicit, or “coded,” rather than expressed overtly. Many popular terms and images associated with current social issues evoke racial fears and stereotypes. Think of the racialized images that come to mind when you hear the words.
“welfare queen,” “gangbanger,” “illegal alien,” or “suicide bomber.” When problems are defined by racial stereotypes, they fuel racist public policies that are then passed into law and punitively target people of color.

After your group has discussed the text, explore the images from Hurricane Katrina.

4b. Exercise with Media Images from Hurricane Katrina

Estimated time: 35 minutes
Materials: Media Images and Framing
Instructions:
Show Photo #1

Show Photo #2
Reflection/Dialogue Questions
What are the stories being suggested by the way this information is presented?
Who are depicted as the villains, victims, or heroes?
What unspoken assumptions are being made?
What consequences or impacts could result from this frame?

Read (or paraphrase) the following passage to the group:

How Media Images Reinforce Frames
You've heard the expressions that “every picture tells a story” and “a picture is worth a thousand words.” These certainly ring true. Images bring stories to life and add faces to names, making them more human and compelling. Visual and emotional triggers are more powerful and memorable than analytical ones, such as facts and statistics. The human brain can process images much faster than it can process a lot of words. That's why many commercials and political ads—where meaning and messages must be conveyed very quickly—focus more on showing than on telling. Visual media—such as TV, YouTube, movies and billboards—have become so politically, culturally, and commercially powerful because they convey so vividly what we are, what we believe, and what we need.

Images can convey frames that we unconsciously absorb. Some of the news coverage in the wake of Hurricane Katrina illustrates this well. The two images and accompanying captions were posted by two popular news services on the same day. These two images are similar—people carrying things as they wade through the floodwaters. However, the captions are very different. The caption accompanying the photo of the dark-skinned person reads, “A young man walks through chest deep flood water after looting a grocery store in New Orleans…” While the caption next to the photo of the light-skinned people says, “Two residents wade through chest-deep water after finding bread and soda from a local grocery store…” The simple images and single-sentence captions convey powerful frames or narratives about what is going on. These photos convey a dominant narrative: that white people are presumed to be good, helpful, law-abiding citizens, while people of color are presumed to be criminals and freeloaders off the system. On the day these photos appeared in the news, people did not see both side by side. Whether you saw the photo of the African American person assumed to be “looting” or the white people presumed to be “finding” food, you would have been exposed to a highly racialized frame. Furthermore, you probably would have subconsciously absorbed the racism in this type of framing since it is so common.

Please note: You may use as much or as little that is presented here to move your conversation along, based on the depth of the conversation that has taken place. This could lead to a discussion about the consequences of racist frames, such as how the immediate response to Katrina focused largely on securing the city from looting, rather than providing relief to the people dying on rooftops and in the Superdome. If the city had been predominantly white people—and everyone was assumed to be heroically finding food to feed their families, rather than looting—it’s likely that relief would have been prioritized over security. A similar dynamic took place in the aftermath of the earthquake in Haiti, where much of the immediate aid efforts by the U.S. focused on securing Haiti rather than helping Haitians.
***If you are running this as a daylong workshop, please be sure to take a break here. ***

4c. Excerpt from *Between Barack and a Hard Place* by Tim Wise

**Estimated time:** 25 minutes

**Materials:** Excerpt from *Between Barack and a Hard Place: Racism and White Denial in the Age of Obama* by Tim Wise handout

**Instructions:** Hand out copies of Tim Wise excerpt, *Between Barack and a Hard Place: Racism and White Denial in the Age of Obama*. Ask people to read piece aloud in small groups. Follow with 3-5 minutes of journaling and 10 minutes of conversation.

**PART II**

4d. Name it! Frame it! And Explain it!

**Estimated time:** 30 minutes

**Materials:** ARC’s *Name It! Frame It! and Explain it!*

**Instructions:** Read the Name It! Frame It! Explain it! Hand out from Applied Research Center in small groups.

A simple way to remember how to frame issues with a racial equity lens is to: Name it! Frame it! and Explain it! Go over the handout in small groups (10 minutes); discuss as a larger group (10 minutes).

4e. Newt Gingrich’s Poverty Code: Practice Exercise using Applied Research Center’s Framing Guide and Worksheet

**Estimated time:** 60 minutes

**Materials:** Copies of ARC’s *Racial Justice Framing Worksheet*

**Instructions:** Give out copies of ARC’s *Racial Justice Framing Worksheet.*

Review and discuss “What are the basic elements of an issue frame?”

Key elements of an issue frame include:

1. What’s the problem?
2. What/who’s the cause?
3. What’s the solution?
4. What’s the needed action?
5. What values are at stake?
Watch: The Daily Show with John Stewart video clip on Newt Gingrich’s Poverty Code about poverty and race.


Read each point below and fill in the Racial Justice Framing worksheet.

1. Examine the issue of systemic poverty, then use this guide to identify the framing elements.
2. Analyze the dominant frame conveyed by Newt Gingrich and how it is reinforced by racism (implicitly or explicitly).
3. Articulate the alternative frame shared by the comedian Larry Wilmore that reveals the racial inequities and highlights racial justice.
4. Lastly, develop a story that conveys the racial justice frame. (A good story humanizes and dramatizes the issues so people can “see” the impacts and “feel” what’s at stake, reveals the causes and patterns, highlights a viable and values-based solution, and compels people to act.)

Note: Through this exercise, participants will see where additional research would be needed if they were engaged in creating some strategic action. Whether ideas come easily and/or there are areas that are more challenging, it is all of equal value in the learning process.
SECTION 5: Closing-Sculpting Theater Exercise

Learning Goals:

- To experience a form of learning through the body and cellular knowing
- To deepen how we come to know ourselves individually and collectively
- To tap into our intrinsic wisdom and share it with others

Estimated Time: 1 hour

Instructions: This may seem like a challenging exercise, but it is well worth the effort! This exercise allows participants to bring forth and use their own creativity and apply it to what they have just learned. There is always a surprise that comes when we allow the space and time to use our bodies for expressing our learning—it’s part of the creative process.

a. Conversation (10 min)

Have a conversation in groups of 10 – 16 (even numbers) about the experience of working with framing. As participants talk about their learning, capture on a piece of paper some of the key words that express emotions/themes that they felt as a result of their experience in this module (i.e., anger, empowerment, surprise, community, etc.).

b. Theater Exercise (40 min)

There will be two rounds of this exercise. Each group counts off (1, 2…1, 2…) to create two even groups. Form two circles, one inside the other. Inner circle faces outer circle. Participants then pair-up. The members of the inside circle are ‘clay’ and participants in outside circle are ‘sculptors.’ There should be about six pairs per circle, create more circles if participants number more than twelve.

Share this rule of theatre with the groups: Always respect the body of the other person. Some people do not want to be touched. Ask before beginning poses. Instead of touching the ‘clay’ you can demonstrate (model) the pose you want and use sign language (hand and foot gestures) to direct. This is a way of practicing boundaries.

Round 1: Building on prior dialogues, select and share a word that is thought of as negative (i.e. anger, oppression, frustration, sadness) that speaks to the emotions/themes that people have named during their conversations.

Have each ‘sculptor’ sculpt the ‘clay’ into the word.

No talking. No planning. Just improvise/react.

Clay freezes.

All of the artists walk around and observe the sculptures.

Round 2: This time select and share a word that is thought of as positive (i.e. hope, love, community, empowerment) that speaks to the emotions/themes that people have named during their conversations.
Move the group back into pairs. Roles are reversed (those that were clay are now in the role of sculptor).
Repeat sculpting exercise.

c. Reflection (6 min)
Follow with a short group conversation of what has been observed. What was this experience like for you? What did you notice by using your body to express yourself?

d. Optional Exercise
After learning this process, you might want to sculpt a sequence depicting a community problem, a transformative action, and an equitable solution. Acting out the building blocks of characters, emotions, values, and actions often help people see and feel stories with their bodies, which is a useful way of constructing a more complete and analytical frame.

Exercise designed by Terry Keleher, ARC and Shakti Butler, World Trust
Two Latino youth, David Moreno and Justin Pacheco, were freed from a California jail on February 10 after being wrongly convicted of murdering their friend. They’d spent two years behind bars while the murderer, a white youth who had confessed to police immediately after the killing, went free.

The nightmare journey of Moreno and Pacheco was a disturbing reminder that racism remains entrenched in the U.S. criminal justice system, but the media campaign that ultimately won their freedom offers a lesson on the power of talking about race and a primer on using the media to challenge racism.

On the evening of November 2, 1997, Moreno and Pacheco were embroiled in a street fight in Vacaville, CA, a largely white, rural town that is becoming a bedroom community for the San Francisco Bay Area and is home to a growing population of color. The fight began when another Latino teenager, Jeremiah Alvarez English, confronted six white youth who had attacked him the previous night.

As the fight began, Moreno and Pacheco went to the aid of Alvarez English. Six against three made for long odds, and Alvarez English was slain by Chad O’Connell, who repeatedly knifed him in the back with an 11-inch hunting knife, according to police reports.
PROVOCATIVE ACT
District Attorney David Paulson refused to prosecute O'Connell, holding that the murder was committed in self-defense. Then, in an outrageous legal maneuver, Paulson charged Moreno and Pacheco with murder, arguing that they committed a “provocative act” by aiding their friend in the fight.

The provocative-act doctrine is an obscure and little-used law. The crime for which it was originally developed is classically represented by a convenience store robbery in which the robber fires a gun at a store clerk who shoots back and accidentally kills a bystander. The doctrine holds that the robber can be held responsible for the bystander’s death by creating the deadly situation.

What allowed Paulson to stretch this law to apply to the Moreno-Pacheco case and, in fact, what powered his entire prosecution was the deep current of racism in our society and criminal justice system. As Van Jones of the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights explained, “The prosecutor decided who the criminals were based upon the color of their skin and then came up with a charge.”

Prosecutors propped up their case by accusing the 18-year-olds of being gang members, despite a severe lack of evidence to support the charge. Nevertheless, the allegation was a powerful lie because it was fueled by the potent stereotype that poses young Latino men as gangbangers.

On November 5, 1998, the jury found Moreno and Pacheco guilty of murder, surprising even the most cynical observers. In the face of this discouraging climate, human rights organizers from two organizations, the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights and We Interrupt This Message, set out to free Moreno and Pacheco.
Organizers first mounted a community organizing campaign to support a legal motion for a new trial. When the motion was granted, they began a media campaign to change the terms of debate surrounding the case.

**CHANGING THE DEBATE**

The campaign won extensive news coverage that highlighted the racist nature of the criminal justice system, the criminalization of youth through anti-gang laws, and the abuse of prosecutorial discretion. *ABC World News Tonight, 60 Minutes, the BBC, the San Francisco Chronicle, the Los Angeles Times, La Opinion, and the London Independent,* among others, covered the story. Ultimately this successful media campaign paved the way for Moreno and Pacheco’s freedom.

News media outlets are often dominated by the same racist values and institutional practices that afflict all large mainstream institutions in this country. Organizers often find that racism is the last explanation journalists will accept for even the most glaring of racial disparities. The key to overcoming this barrier is careful documentation of racism for news reporters.

Although the local news coverage had been severely biased against Moreno and Pacheco, organizers were able to piece together all the facts of the case by carefully combing through those reports. The organizers constructed a complete story and presented it to journalists from major news outlets, citing a news source for each of the facts presented. As a result, journalists received a fully documented case of racism that not only was undeniable, but in fact made for a compelling and attractive news story. In an ironic after-note, subsequent local news coverage changed to reflect the more balanced perspective offered by major outlets.
FRAMING THE BIG PICTURE

News media prefer to tell stories about individuals, with the larger questions about social structures lost in the background. As a result, activists who want to generate news articles that speak to the roots of racism must present journalists with stories that are framed around racism’s institutional aspects. Otherwise news outlets will, at best, offer only stories about individual “bad egg” racists, leaving the larger questions about institutional racism untouched.

One-way to frame stories around institutional racism is to script them to include characters that represent institutions and policies. The Moreno-Pacheco case was prosecuted in the courtroom by a deputy district attorney, but organizers targeted the district attorney in their media campaign. In this way, activists delivered to the media a story character, the district attorney, who represented the whole institution of criminal prosecution in Solano County.

The Moreno-Pacheco community organizing campaign also provided activists with a tool to re-frame news coverage. When reporters have only a courtroom trial to cover, their stories will often feature only those players who dominate the courtroom: the lawyers. Then the stories will often focus solely on the course of the trial.

In the Moreno-Pacheco campaign, the community events and protests outside the courtroom produced news stories that offered the voices of human rights activists who addressed the larger issue of racism. Eventually the defense lawyers also publicly discussed the racist nature of the case. Moreover, the events organized by activists and the Moreno and Pacheco families produced news stories before court proceedings even began. As a result, the media were already at a boil when the trial started.
SHARED VALUES

Racial stereotypes in the media are potent, and lies fueled by racism must be directly addressed and challenged. In the Moreno-Pacheco case, the prosecutor framed how the jury and the public saw the youths by accusing them of belonging to a gang. In response, Moreno-Pacheco activists immediately approached reporters and exposed the utter lack of evidence for the prosecutor’s claim. By preempting the district attorney and directly addressing a racist lie, the activists were able to prevent a stereotype from dominating the minds of reporters.

Even though it may not always be immediately apparent, racial fairness and civil rights are values held close to heart by many Americans. The power of talking about race lies in highlighting those values. By constructing media messages about race that speak to shared values, activists can claim the moral high ground and control the terms of debate. Talking about race requires certain care, effort, and strategy, but the payoff can be enormous. In the Moreno-Pacheco campaign, activists talked about race loud and clear, winning the hearts and minds of the media, the public, and ultimately the jury. fin

Read this online at http://colorlines.com/archives/2000/12/talking_race_to_the_media.html

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Media Images and Framing

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Exercise with Media Images from Hurricane Katrina
How Media Images Reinforce Frames

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Excerpt from

*Between Barack and a Hard Place: Racism and White Denial in the Age of Obama*

by Tim Wise

Tim Wise is among the most prominent anti-racist writers and activists in the U.S. Wise has spoken in 48 states, on over 400 college campuses, and to community groups around the nation. Wise has provided anti-racism training to teachers nationwide, and has trained physicians and medical industry professionals on how to combat racial inequities in health care.

Let’s play a game, shall we? The name of the game is called “Imagine.” The way it’s played is simple: we’ll envision recent happenings in the news, but then change them up a bit. Instead of envisioning white people as the main actors in the scenes we’ll conjure—the ones who are driving the action—we’ll envision black folks or other people of color instead. The object of the game is to imagine the public reaction to the events or incidents if the main actors were of color, rather than white. At the end of the game, whoever gains the most insight into the workings of race in America, wins.

So let’s begin.

Imagine that hundreds of black protesters were to descend upon Washington DC and Northern Virginia, just a few miles from the Capitol and White House, armed with AK-47s, assorted handguns, and ammunition. Now imagine that some of these protesters spoke of the need for political revolution, and possibly even armed conflict, in the event that the government enforced laws they didn’t like. Would these protesters—these black protesters with guns—be seen as brave defenders of the Second Amendment, or would most whites view them as a danger to the republic? What if they were Arab-Americans? After all, that’s what happened recently when white gun enthusiasts descended upon the nation’s capital, arms in hand, and verbally announced their readiness to make war on the country’s political leaders if the need arose.

Imagine that white members of Congress, while walking to work, were surrounded by thousands of angry black people, one of whom proceeded to spit on one of those congressmen for not voting the way the black demonstrators desired. Would the protesters be seen merely as patriotic Americans voicing their opinions, or as an angry, potentially violent, and even insurrectionary mob? After all, this is what white Tea Party protesters did recently in Washington.

Imagine that a rap artist were to say, in reference to a white president, “He’s a piece of $hit and I told him to suck on my machine gun.” Well, that’s what rocker Ted Nugent said recently about President Obama.

Imagine that a prominent mainstream black political commentator had long employed an overt bigot as Executive Director of his organization, and that this bigot regularly participated in black separatist conferences, and once assaulted a white person while calling them a racial slur. When that prominent black commentator and his sister—who also works for the organization—defended the bigot as a good guy who was misunderstood and “going through a tough time in his life”, would anyone accept their excuses? Would that commentator still have a place on a mainstream network? That’s what happened in the real world, when Pat Buchanan employed, as Executive Director of his group America’s Cause, a blatant racist who did the white equivalents of all these things: attending white separatist conferences and attacking a black woman while calling her the n-word.

Imagine that a black radio host were to suggest that the only way to get promoted in the administration of a white president is by “hating black people,” or that a prominent white person had only endorsed a white presidential candidate as an act of racial bonding, or blamed a white president for a fight on a school bus in which a black kid was jumped by two white kids, or said that he wouldn’t want to kill all conservatives, but rather would like to leave just enough—“living fossils” as he called them—“so we will never forget what these people stood for.” These are things that Rush Limbaugh has said: about Barack Obama’s administration, Colin Powell’s endorsement of Barack Obama, a fight on a school bus in Belleville, Illinois in which two black kids beat up a white kid, and about liberals in general.
Imagine that a black pastor and former member of the U.S. military were to declare as part of his opposition to a white president’s policies, that he was ready to “suit up, get my gun, go to Washington, and do what they trained me to do.” This is, after all, what Pastor Stan Craig said recently at a Tea Party rally in Greenville, South Carolina.

Imagine a black radio talk show host gleefully predicting a revolution by people of color if the government continues to be dominated by the rich white men who have been “destroying” the country, or if said radio personality were to call Christians or Jews non-humans, or say that when it came to conservatives, the best solution would be to “hang ‘em high.” Furthermore, what would happen to any congressional representative who praised that commentator for “speaking common sense” and likened his hate talk to “American values”? Those are among the things said by radio host and best-selling author Michael Savage, predicting white revolution in the face of multiculturalism, and about Muslims and liberals, respectively. Also, it was Congressman Culbertson from Texas who praised Savage, despite Savages’s hateful rhetoric.

Imagine a black political commentator suggesting that the only thing the guy who flew his plane into the Austin, Texas IRS building did wrong was not blowing up Fox News instead. This is what Anne Coulter said about Tim McVeigh, when she noted that his only mistake was not blowing up the New York Times.

Imagine that a popular black liberal website posted comments about the daughter of a white president, calling her “typical redneck trash,” or a “whore” whose mother entertains her by “making monkey sounds.” That’s comparable to what conservatives posted about Malia Obama on freerepublic.com last year, when they referred to her as “ghetto trash.”

Imagine that black protesters at a large political rally were walking around with signs calling for the lynching of their congressional enemies. White conservatives did just that last year, in reference to Democratic party leaders in Congress.

In other words, imagine that even one-third of the anger and vitriol currently being hurled at President Obama (by folks who are almost exclusively white) were being aimed instead at a white president, by people of color. How many whites viewing the anger, the hatred, the contempt for that white president would then wax eloquent about free speech and the glories of democracy? How many would be calling for further crackdowns on thuggish behavior, and for investigations into the radical agendas of those same people of color?

To even ask these questions is to answer them. Protest is only seen as fundamentally American when those who have long had the luxury of seeing themselves as prototypical Americans engage in it. When the dangerous and dark “other” does so, however, it isn’t viewed as normal or natural, let alone patriotic. Which is why Rush Limbaugh could say, this past week, that the Tea Party represents ordinary, common Americans standing up for their rights for the first time since the Civil War: a statement that erases the normalcy and “American-ness” of blacks in the civil rights struggle, not to mention women in the fight for suffrage and equality, working people in the fight for better working conditions, and LGBT folks as they struggle to be treated as full and equal human beings.

This, my friends, is what white privilege is all about. The ability to threaten others, to engage in violent and incendiary rhetoric without consequence, to be viewed as patriotic and normal no matter what you do, and never be feared and despised, as people of color would be if they tried to get away with half the mess whites do on a daily basis.

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ARC’s: Name it! Frame it! And Explain it!

A simple way to remember how to frame issues with a racial equity lens is to: Name it! Frame it! and Explain it!

1. **Naming** the racism means explicitly using the “R-word”—race. If you use the term “racism,” it’s helpful to qualify it with the words “institutional,” “systemic,” or “structural.” When talking about systemic or structural racism, it helps to use terms such as “racial discrimination,” “racial inequality,” or “racial disparities” (instead of terms such as “racism” and “racialist,” which are popularly associated with individuals and their intentions). Don’t try to soften or sugarcoat the realities of racism by using terms such as “ethnicity” or “culture,” or proxies such as “class” or “place” if race is the most significant factor.

2. **Framing** the issues means presenting a clear, compelling, convincing, and complete narrative that addresses the problem, causes, action required for solution, and values at stake.

3. **Explaining** means that the phenomenon of systemic racism is not well understood or believed, so it needs explanation and proof. Use a variety of evidence, anecdotal and statistical, qualitative and quantitative to illustrate the causes and patterns of systemic racism.

What does it mean to frame issues with a racial equity lens?

- **Racial justice framing** puts a discussion of race and racism in the foreground of the public debate. We need to **illuminate** racism in order to **eliminate** racism. When we are not **consciously** addressing racial equity, we are often **subconsciously** replicating racism. Silence equals complicity.

- **Racial justice framing** includes challenging racism (anti-racism) and advocating for equitable alternatives (advancing equity). It reveals problems of racial injustice and points towards equitable solutions. It is not enough to be **reactive**; a racial justice frame needs to be **proactive**.

- **Racial justice framing** addresses racism **explicitly**, but not necessarily **exclusively**. If there are other significant dynamics at play (e.g. gender, economic inequality) these should also be articulated and addressed. Racial justice can be a complimentary frame with other frames and can help you address problems and the solutions more completely. When addressing race along with other dynamics, it’s still important to address each dynamic with “dedicated, specific, and sufficient” attention.

- **Racial equity framing** (one that focuses specifically on remedying racism) can be coupled with a universal frame (one that seeks to benefit everyone). These can be compatible rather than competitive ways to frame an issue.

Why use a racial equity lens to frame issues?

- It reveals a reality that often goes unnamed. Ignoring racism helps perpetuates it.
- It offers evidence of racism by documenting unequal impacts and disparate outcomes.
- It challenges prevailing cultural norms and myths.
- It emphasizes the need for institutional and policy change.
- It points to equitable solutions that address **systems** rather than **symptoms**.

What are some challenges involved in using a racial equity frame?

- The burden of proof falls on the advocate to prove that racial inequity exists. Few people are willing to believe racism is a factor unless you can produce clear and convincing evidence.
- Adopting a racial justice frame often goes against society’s popular myths and norms. Any efforts to make racism visible are quickly dismissed as “playing the race card.”
- Sometimes allies, including people of color, are resistant to using the frame for fear of “rocking the boat” or being divisive. It can evoke internal opposition within your own organization, as well as external backlash from opponents wishing to discredit and divide people.
- Systemic racism can be complicated to explain and understand. Racial justices advocates must be able to articulate how and why the issue is racialized.

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ARC’s: Racial Justice Framing Worksheet

1. Select a current issue to examine, then use this guide to identify the framing elements.
2. Analyze the dominant frame and how it is reinforced by racism (implicitly or explicitly).
3. Create an alternative frame that reveals the racial inequities and highlights racial justice.
4. Lastly, develop a story that conveys the racial justice frame. (A good story humanizes and dramatizes the issues so people can “see” the impacts and feel what’s at stake, reveals the causes and patterns, highlights a viable and values-based solution and compels people to act.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Framing Element</th>
<th>Dominant/Racist Frame</th>
<th>Alternative/Racial Justice Frame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(conceals and reinforces racism)</td>
<td>(reveals racism and advances equity)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. What’s the **Problem**?

2. What’s the **Cause**
   (What/Who’s Responsible)

3. What’s the **Solution**?

4. What **Action** is Needed?

5. What **Values** are highlighted?

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Ten Tips for Framing Issues With a Racial Equity Lens - Page 2

1. Frame first and frequently: Try to make your frame the prevailing one to which others must respond. Define the terms of the debate using your language and concepts to name, frame, and explain things.

2. Re-frame: If you can’t frame first, re-frame the issue by presenting your own explanation of the problem and proposing your own solution. It’s best to avoid using the terms of an opposing frame, so as not to reinforce it—use your own terms.

3. Be proactive: Don’t just react to problems of racism—create new racially equitable proposals that are concrete and viable.

4. Project your values: Highlight messages of fairness, justice, equity, inclusion, dignity, unity, and other positive and shared values.

5. Emphasize institutional accountability: Don’t just focus on personal blame.

6. Create linkages: Connect different issues and constituencies in order to broaden the appeal and base of supporters for your issue.

7. Dramatize and humanize the problem: Highlight injustice and appeal to moral indignation by putting a human face on the story.

8. Evoke an image, feeling, and response: Convey the urgency for change. People respond to their emotions, not just to information.

9. Make it believable: Present a complete story with enough supporting evidence to make it hard to dispute.

10. Keep it simple and clear: make the frame easy to remember so that people will repeat it.
Racial Justice Framing Guide

1. Define the Problem: What racial inequities exist with this issue? Do different racial groups experience different impacts/outcomes? Who is harmed most and who benefits most? Who or what is causing the racial disparities? What institutions or policies are most involved and how do they contribute to or compound the problem? How did it get this way and is it worsening?

2. Identify the Stakeholders: How are people of color—especially those most directly affected by this issue—involves in analyzing the problem, defining the solution, and framing the issue? How can people of color be fully engaged and empowered in the way this issue is addressed?

3. Propose a Solution: What is a concrete solution that could reduce or eliminate the racial disparities and advance racial justice?

4. Identify the Power-holder: Who has the decision-making authority to approve your proposed solution? Who can you hold accountable/responsible? Who can you target or direct your public action towards and influence to do the right thing?

5. Identify Purposeful Actions: What specifically can you urge supporters to do in order to move the proposed solution forward?

6. Discredit or Replace the Prevailing Frame: What dominant frames, myths, images, or messages shape public perceptions of this issue? How do they conceal/distort the truth? How can they be challenged?

7. Develop a Racial Justice Frame: What’s a compelling story about this issue that names, frames, and explains the racial inequities? How can you demonstrate and describe the racial injustices while highlighting principles such as equity, fairness, and dignity for all?

8. Anticipate the Detractors: What kinds of obstacles do you anticipate if you were to publicly use a racial justice frame when describing this issue? Who will be the biggest detractors?

9. Assess the Risks and Benefits: What could be the risks and benefits of using a racial justice framing? What could be the risks of NOT using a racial justice frame?

10. Decide the Frame: Weighing the potential costs and benefits, do you think it would be advantageous to use a racial justice frame for this issue? Why or why not?