

Waking Up to My Whiteness

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Moving to Madison from Sacramento, California—named *TIME* magazine’s “Most Integrated City in America” in 2003—was a rude awakening. Within a week I was conscious that my work and neighborhood environments were virtually all white.

Within a year I had reached the conclusion that race was the elephant in the middle of Wisconsin’s living room, overshadowing every political, social, and cultural issue in this state.

The dismal and morally outrageous statistics are all too familiar. This past spring, the nonpartisan Annie E. Casey Foundation issued a report showing Wisconsin ranked 50th out of 50 states in the well-being of Black children.

In March I attended the White Privilege Conference in Madison (the WCC was an institutional co-sponsor), a national gathering of academics and community leaders committed to racial equity in our society.

The four day event for me, personally, was a transformative moment. I realized—perhaps for the first time—how ignorant I was about my own racial identity and its place within the larger system and structures of privilege. On the journey towards racial justice, this is a critical way station where I need to spend more time.

Three books—all recommended at the White Privilege Conference-- have invited me into a deeper self-examination of my Whiteness:

- *“Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?” And Other Conversations about Race*, written by Clinical Psychologist Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum who is currently the President of Spellman College, is an invaluable look at racial development in Blacks, Whites, Hispanics and others in our White context. The helpful discussion guide at the back of the book makes this a fine introductory resource for adult study groups.
- *Walking Up White and Finding Myself in the Story of Race*, by Debby Irving, is the moving and empowering autobiography of a New England suburban mom who uncovers in her own story the painful realities of racial inequities and her role in addressing them.
- *Racing to Justice: Transforming our Conceptions of Self and Other to Build an Inclusive Society*, by U.C. Berkeley Law Professor John Powell, provides a useful critique of public policy prescriptions from both the Right and the Left and offers a new roadmap for an inclusive society which integrates race, spirituality, self and social justice.

The epiphany I experienced at the White Privilege Conference has pushed me to a clearer view of my own identity and place in the struggle for racial justice. It’s an epiphany more Wisconsinites need to experience.

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