

P R E F A C E

Understanding and Dismantling Racism is the fourth book on racism that I have written over the past forty years. In each of these books my primary goal has been to describe how white racism functions in the United States and how it has been changing—for better and for worse. In that sense, each book has been a kind of historical update. In a far more important sense, each book reflects the process of my own growth in how to understand and dismantle racism.

The first book, *Why Black Power?*, was written in 1968 in the context of the fiery hot cauldron of the movements for racial justice that were reshaping the social and political fabric of U.S. society. That book's answer to the question, Why black power?, was, and still is, "Because of white racism." It was written as a message to white people that black power—as well as red power, brown power, and yellow power—were an inevitable and essential response to white racism and to the irresponsible use of white power.

I wrote the second book, *Liberating Our White Ghetto*, four years later in 1972, just as it was beginning to be obvious that despite all the legal changes in the 1960s, little alteration was taking place in the imbalance of power relationships between white society and communities of color. In my personal understanding of racism, it was becoming increasingly clear that the central problem was not simply white unwillingness to change, but the imprisoning and self-perpetuating nature of systemic racism that captures, separates and

destroys all of us—not just some of us. We needed then—and still need now—to comprehend the imprisonment of the white society in its institutional and cultural structures, and the necessity of the white society, and not only people of color, to be set free from racism.

The next twenty years were relatively quiet in terms of public protest against the continuing racism and racial disparity in our society. Perhaps, more than anything else, it was a time of recovery from the violent repression that brought the movements of the 1960s to a standstill. Especially during the 1980s, a pretense of peaceful progress and successful change was portrayed in virtually every institutional and community setting in our society, primarily through programs of “multicultural diversity and inclusiveness.” When I wrote *Dismantling Racism: The Continuing Challenge to White America*, published in 1991, there were ever-widening cracks and fissures in these programs that began to signify the inevitable failure of multicultural diversity as a solution to racism. The book sought to be a part of a new wake-up call and to challenge white people to participate in the ongoing task of dismantling racism.

Now it is almost twenty years later, and the first decade of the twenty-first century is nearing completion. The failure of programs of multicultural diversity and inclusiveness is increasingly obvious, while public protest and new forms of organizing against racism are developing in ways that are irrepressibly strong and powerful. For some, the renewed turmoil is a depressing sign of defeat. For others—and I count myself among them—it is a wonderful opportunity, a new sign of hope and promise. This new book, *Understanding and Dismantling Racism*, tries to present new learnings about systemic racism from the past fifteen years and to describe exciting new organizing opportunities to transform structures of systemic racism. In this book, I attempt to portray how changes in recent years have brought about both progress and regression in the struggle to end racism, and I will share my own growth in understanding how racism can ultimately be dismantled.

Expressions of Gratitude

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