

# **Antiracism in Peace-Building and Conflict Resolution**

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**Columbia Law School Mediation Clinic**

# Welcome and Introductions

## **Professor Alex Carter**

Director, Columbia Law School Mediation Clinic

**Tumise Asebiomo, Brigitte Atchekzai, Jeeyoon Chung,  
Angie Garcia, Meyer Horne, Young Joon Joo, Oliver Kwon,  
Cam Molis, Aïta Seck, Anna Xie, and Erica Zou**

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# Goals for this Workshop

- Identify the ways in which race and racial bias manifest in conflict resolution
- Examine the role of a leader in navigating issues of race and racial bias to provide access to justice for all
- Discuss best practices for situations in which identity-based bias may emerge

**Icebreaker**

# Icebreaker

Have you ever observed a conflict where you believed a racial, religious, or cultural identity-based bias played an underlying and unspoken role in driving someone's decision or behavior?

What were the circumstances, and what if anything did you say or do?

**What is antiracism?**

# Intro

Three levels of cultural/racial awareness and training that aim to bring about positive change:

- 1. Diversity Awareness**
- 2. Cultural Competence**
- 3. Antiracism**

But do these trainings address...

Individual racism?

Interpersonal racism?

Institutional racism?

Systemic racism?



# Diversity Awareness

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Acknowledges and respects differences</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Only focuses on racism on an <b>individual</b> or <b>interpersonal</b> level</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Celebrates learning about a variety of cultures</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Presents diversity/cultural awareness as a corporate or organizational asset</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Develops sensitivity and understanding toward different ethnic groups</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● <b><u>Does not</u></b> address institutional racism, systemic racism, or social dynamics</li></ul>



# Cultural Competence

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Goes beyond mere awareness and pushes the ongoing practice of cross-cultural learning</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Does not address issues of power, privilege, or access through a critical lens - <b><u>does not</u></b> address systemic racism</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Moves from acknowledgment of diversity to active celebration of diversity</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Maintains predetermined assumptions about cultural beliefs/characteristics and creates a sense of “otherness”</li></ul>

# Antiracism

- Antiracism is “*the **active** process of identifying and eliminating racism by changing systems, organizational structures, policies and practices and attitudes, so that power is redistributed and shared equitably.*”
- The opposite of ‘racist’ is not ‘non-racist’ but ‘antiracist’

# Role of an Antiracist



- Understands that inequality exists not just on the individual, but also the systemic and structural level
- Evaluates issues of unequal power and access from a broader societal perspective
- Addresses how existing practices, policies, and procedures under-serve People of Color and over-serve White People

# Antiracism in Peace-Building and Conflict Resolution

What is antiracism in peace-building and conflict resolution, and why should we care?

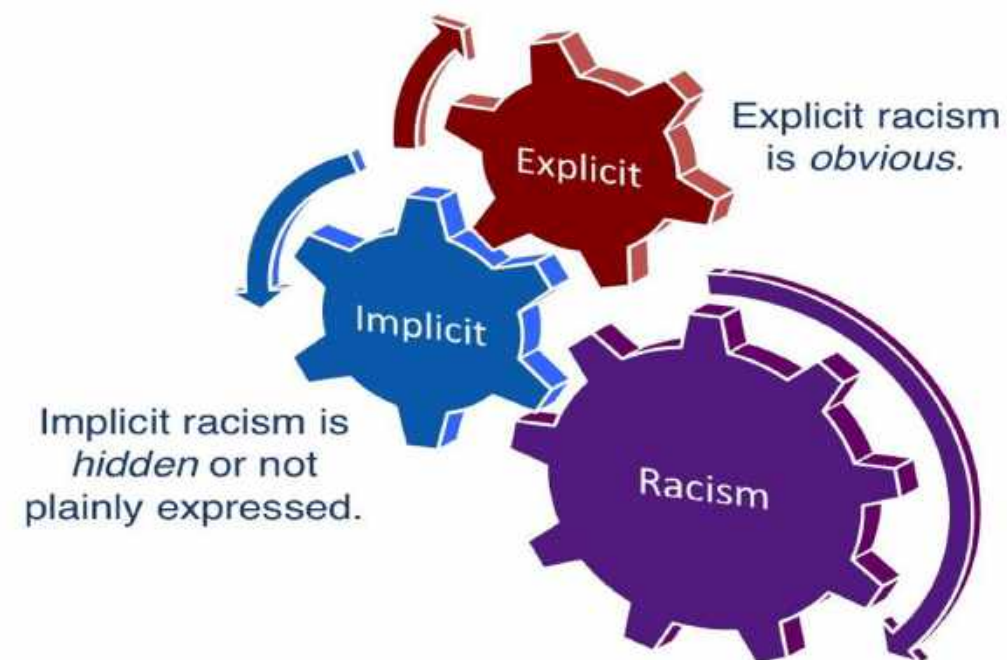
- **Embracing a work environment** with diverse backgrounds, cultures and viewpoints
- **Actively identifying and confronting issues** such as bias to promote inclusive negotiation and resolutions
- **Promoting access to justice** by supporting peace-building and diversity, especially in the context of deep polarization

# **Manifestations in Conflict Resolution**

# Overt Assertions of Racial Bias

Intentional or obvious harmful attitudes or behaviors towards a party because of their identity (e.g., race, religion, sexual orientation).

- Overt bias can manifest in direct prejudice, hostility, or clear negative feelings.



## Examples

- Speeches or behaviors that demonstrate negative racial attitudes (e.g., racial slurs)
- Use of generalized negative attitudes/stereotypes directed toward groups

# The Dog-Whistle Context

- An expression, statement, or coded rhetoric that has a secondary meaning understood by a specific group.\*
  - **Active:** An expression or statement intended to communicate a secondary meaning to a specific group.
  - **Passive:** An expression or statement that carries an unintended secondary meaning.



\*Merriam Webster, Stephen Whitley, "Dog-whistle" rhetoric: Pedagogy and the coded language of modern american politics " (2014).

# Institutional Skepticism

Racial, ethnic or religious minorities may have a lack of confidence in certain institutions.

- In the US, general lack of confidence in the legal system because of historical mistreatment
  - Over-sentencing, disrespect in the courtroom, overrepresentation + underrepresentation

Globally, peace building and conflict resolution efforts may be hindered by structural inequality and doubts rooted in past mistreatment

It's important to honor very real possible skepticism by being inclusive + perceptive.



# Barriers to Communications

Racism, racial bias and racial dynamics can hinder communication between parties.

- Stereotypes and racist narratives may foster the use of language that contributes to a sense of isolation amongst POCs
- Labeling rather than describing issues leads to oversimplification
- Marginalized voices are often silenced or sidelined

# The Issue of Implicit Bias

“Unconsciously held attitudes and stereotypes can affect our interaction with others and may predict behavior.”\*

- Often people do not have conscious and intentional control over social perceptions and judgments that motivate their actions
- After tens of thousand Race IAT tests were taken, “88% of white people had a pro-white or anti-black implicit bias.”\*\*

\*Carol Izumi, Implicit Bias and the Illusion of Mediator Neutrality, 34 Wash. U. J. L. & POL'y 71 (2010).

\*\*Shankar Vedantam, See No Bias, Wash. Po. (2005)

# Color Blindness

v.

# Color Consciousness: A New Approach

## Colorblind Approach:

- The belief that racial group membership and race-based differences should not be taken into account when decisions are made, impressions are formed, and behaviors are enacted.

## Color-Conscious Approach:

- An approach that takes into account race-based differences when decisions are made, impressions are formed, and behaviors are enacted as a means of more directly addressing issues relating to racial inequities, biases, and discrimination.

\*Evan P. Apfelbaum, et al., "Racial Color Blindness: Emergence, Practice, and Implications," (2012).

\*Destiny Peery, "The Colorblind Ideal in a Race-Conscious Reality: The Case for a New Legal Ideal for Race Relations." (2011).

# Color Blindness v. Color Consciousness: A New Approach

## Where Color Blindness Fails to Foster Anti-racist Inclusive Environments

- As mechanisms that perpetuate racism become more covert, refusing to take note publically of race allows people to ignore manifestations of discrimination.

## Color Consciousness and Cross Sector Spaces

- In cross-sector organizations, those that centered conversations and actions on race and racism were more successful. This centering of color conscious actions and conversations led to building sustained commitment, undertaking action, and ensuring sustainability of their collective action

\*Adia Harvey Wingfield, Color Blindness is Counterproductive, The Atlantic (2015).

Tabitha Bently, The Challenge of Negotiating Race in Cross-Sector Spaces,, Stanford Social Innovation Review (2019).

**Tools**

# Guaranteeing the Quality of the Process

## A Leader's Anti-Racist Role in Conflict Resolution

- Ensure **procedural fairness**:
  - Be **aware** of potential problems
  - Promote **party participation**
    - Mindfulness of racial stereotypes or social overtones that may inhibit communication
    - Make sure every has their say
  - Promote **mutual respect**
    - E.g., Acknowledgement & Stroking
  - Do not be afraid take **active steps** to combat racially-charged behavior
    - Anywhere from “Naming the Issue” to Terminating the Process may be justified

# Guaranteeing the Quality of the Process

- Regulating **Your Own Biases:**
  - A leader in conflict resolution must take appropriate steps to avoid allowing their own biases to impact the process
  - Awareness is the first step!
    - Implicit bias test, contemplating and questioning your own beliefs and heuristics
- Regulating **Party Biases:**
  - Once again, do not be afraid to be **active!**
  - **Bottom Line:** When a leader disrupts racism in conflict resolution, they are not interceding on behalf of one of the parties but rather on behalf of the process itself.

# Acknowledgment & Stroking

## Acknowledgment

When the facilitator **points out progress or a productive move** by one party to make sure the other party **notices and processes** it.

Examples of behavior to acknowledge:

- acknowledging feelings
- taking ownership of past mistakes
- expressing apology, remorse, regret

## Stroking

When the facilitator **praises** a party for any **positive behavior**.

Examples of behavior to stroke:

- civility or relationship-building
- self-advocacy
- bearing with the process
- being more open-minded



# The benefits of acknowledging and stroking during conflict resolution:

1. Demonstrates facilitator **impartiality**, building trust and legitimacy in the process
1. Minimizes **reactive devaluation**, which is when parties feel like an “out-group” and become more dismissive, threatened, and polarized
1. Highlights **constructive behavior**, drawing parties into the process and engaging them in productive behavior
1. Models **empathy** for participants

# Reframing, Looping, and Clarification

Using Coded Language: Intent v. Impact

- Example: Giving someone a thumbs-up gesture. What does this mean?
  - In some countries, it is a widely recognized sign of approval or agreement.
  - In others, however, it is highly offensive.

Effective Communication requires mutual understanding.

- Do I understand that statement or action?
- Can I communicate that understanding?
- Did they confirm that understanding?

# Name the Issue

**Sometimes you will  
have to directly  
address the issue.**

For example, if one person references another person's race, gender, or ethnic origin in a negative manner repeatedly in a conversation, then you might say, "When you say \*insert microaggression\* do you intend for it to mean \*insert implication\*?"

- **Relieves** parties from the burden of naming the issue
- Clarifies **intent** from **impact**
- **Models** appropriate framing and rhetoric
- Confronts the issue for the sake of **progress**

# One-on-One Conversations

**One-on-one conversations can enable parties in conflict “to explore more fully the needs and interests underlying their stated positions.”**

- **Evaluate**: Am I in the position to pull someone aside and have a conversation that can move our overall conflict resolution process forward?
- **Consider**: Benefits of more individualized conversations include:
  - Venting and deescalation
  - Information gathering
  - Coaching and reality testing
  - Caution (consider impartiality, neutrality, bias, power)

**When all is said  
and done, at  
what point do  
you walk away  
or break?**

**1. Ask yourself, “At what point do racism and racial dynamics eclipse progress otherwise being made toward peace-building?”**

- a. Consider that having difficult conversation may increase the possibility of reaching a resolution.
- b. Note: Race and racism may be central to the conflict at hand, which may raise the threshold of when you step away.

**1. Strategies for exiting:**

- a. “I don’t think I can help you any further.”
- b. “I recognize that race/racism is impacting this conflict. Without addressing it directly, we may be unable to move forward effectively.”

# Hypo #1

## Direct Assertions of Racial Bias/Discrimination

A junior member of your team approaches you about feelings of racial discrimination relating to promotion opportunities and general treatment by her direct workplace supervisor. The junior teammember is the only person on the team who identifies as a member of the ethnic minority of the country. Her supervisor states that she has been treated fairly, and that her lack of promotional opportunities are the result of poor work product and poor teamwork. The supervisor only wants to talk about datapoints and refuses to directly engage in conversation about the race claim.

# Hypo #2

## Dog-Whistle Scenario

The country of Arendelle has been experiencing military unrest on its northern border with the country of Maldonia. The two have negotiated a peace-talk. In deciding who to send as an envoy to Maldonia, the Arendelle government proposes a representative who is a member of the country's southern and lighter-skinned ethnic group as opposed to one from the northern darker-skinned ethnic group who actually lives on the border. Citizens from the north have approached you with objections to this decision.

QUESTIONS?



# STAY IN TOUCH!



Alexandra Carter



@alexandrabcarter



<https://alexcarterasks.com>



[alexandra.carter@law.columbia.edu](mailto:alexandra.carter@law.columbia.edu)



**ALEXANDRA CARTER**

**CLINICAL PROFESSOR OF LAW &  
THE DIRECTOR OF THE MEDIATION CLINIC  
AT COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL**

*Unleash Inst*