



RACISM & POVERTY?

FALL 2021 NEWSLETTER

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Dear Friends,

As a group that is extremely diverse in terms of race, culture and socio-economic backgrounds, our ATD Fourth World community must keep learning from the connections between racism and poverty. We need to understand together what they mean today for our way of thinking and acting together.

To explore further those topics, a group was created with people from different areas: New Mexico, Virginia, Louisiana, New York and others. You will read more about some of the key take-aways in this newsletter. This work will continue and expand.

For me, among the many transformative lessons learned together, one is that race and racism were intentionally created to prevent exactly the kind of movement we have been building. And that to develop such a movement today we have to address the barrier that was intentionally put in our way centuries ago.

In the group, Dave Meyer, from Washington DC, understood: *"We cannot bring all people in poverty in the United States together if we don't first take down the barriers that keep people apart - and the number one barrier is racism."*

Within ATD Fourth World we know that a key to unlocking the capacity of people from different races and ethnicities to come together is to have, as a unifying reference, the experiences, hopes, and efforts of the ones who struggle the most. Because those experiences are most of the time very similar across races, they have the power to resonate beyond the race divide. And they have the capacity to build bridges. As Tina, an activist from New York said to Kim, an activist from Boston after having heard what she went through in the shelter system: *"I've been there, been there! I felt like you were talking for me, like we were together! (...) I was like: God, just keep talking. I was like: is that me up there talking? Is she just a white version of me?"*

In ATD Fourth World, we have the chance to come together, often like family, embracing our differences and building relationships beyond race. And we know we have more to learn together and with others. As a movement, how do we continue learning about racism in ways that help us reach our goals? As allies and activists, how does this work on racism and poverty strengthen our way of being caring community members? How can we join forces with other social and racial justice movements to learn from one another and to act together?

These are some of the questions that, with your help, we will continue to explore.

In solidarity,

Guillaume Charvon
National Director

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RACISM AND POVERTY?

This [Racism and Poverty] group was lighting up my brain. We were sitting there and changing the views on each other and each moment we understood each other even more. - Rosetta Savanna, ATD Fourth World Activist in New York

Over the past year, ATD Fourth World has been exploring new ways to understand the relationship between racism and poverty in the United States. We had a **Fourth World People's University** on the topic in New York City. **Discussions with young Volunteer Corps members** have been pushing older members to look more purposefully at the intersections between racism and poverty. A **Racism & Poverty Working Group** was formed with long-time ATD Fourth World members from diverse backgrounds across the country.

This working group met virtually eleven times in two sessions with a primary purpose of creating and practicing facilitation techniques that would allow for fruitful and healthy discussions about racism amongst people with very different first-hand experiences. After our first session, we refined our goals to: 1) Working on oneself and sharing one's own experience 2) Looking at poverty as a bridge within social justice work 3) Gaining knowledge about racism 4) Gaining confidence to speak out about racism. Our third session will expand on these goals and include more people.

GOING FORWARD

Areas for further research

- ATD Fourth World's past work on racial dynamics
- Social justice coalitions of the past which centered people with first-hand experience of poverty
- What ATD Fourth World has to learn from new coalitions with anti-racism groups
- What ATD Fourth World has to offer anti-racism groups
- How do white people experience poverty differently than other racial identities?

Next steps

- Evolve the practice of discussing and exploring the relationship between poverty and racism
- Center the experience and the current realities of those who live in the intersection of racism and poverty
- Include more people in the discussions
- Ask more questions
- Consider developing publications and webinars
- Develop relationships with partner organizations to explore coalition building

RECENT & CURRENT WORK

HISTORY

"Through the poor, and thanks to the poor, America will find a new identity. Blacks and whites will once more form one people, the American people. This is the aspiration I felt in many groups I met."

- Joseph Wresinski, Founder ATD Fourth World, after visiting many civil rights groups and leaders in the late 60's and early 70's



Guiding ideas throughout this work

Asking questions is a better guide than finding answers

ATD Fourth World's work is to link what we learn about racism to overcoming poverty

What we need to continue to learn about

How those who struggle to just get through their day can fully contribute to these discussions

The power dynamics in our projects and other interactions

Intersections between racism and poverty as well as other oppressions

Microaggressions between colleagues

Accepting discomfort while still able to be in the conversation

Some concepts we learned or affirmed

Racism was created to divide the disempowered

Spaces are needed for dialogue amongst diverse people

We can't fight poverty without fighting racism

We can't fight racism without fighting poverty

Various kinds of privileges can interfere with anti-racism work

We each have a lot to learn from other racial experiences

We each come at anti-racist work through the lens of our own experience