

## From the Ending Racism Task Force

### **What We Are Learning about Being Anti-Racist**

Last month, nine members of the Ethical Society participated in a three-day workshop produced by the organization White People Confronting Racism. We wanted to develop our skills challenging racism both around us and within us. Here is some of what we learned.

**Speak up:** When anyone makes a racially offensive statement, it is our responsibility to speak up. It doesn't matter whether the insult was intentional. Often, white people recognize offensive statements made in private conversations or public settings. But we hesitate to say something for fear of conflict or rejection. We must recognize and overcome our personal obstacles to action.

We can lower the temperature on such exchanges by "calling in" rather than "calling out" the speaker. Calling out, which can be counter-productive, means bringing attention to harmful words by publicly shaming the speaker. Calling in means framing our objections as concerned inquiries into the speaker's motivation and meaning in the interest of promoting understanding. It can be done in the moment or privately, depending on the circumstances.

**Recognize privilege:** Remember that sometimes white people's experience is not the same as Black people's. Things white

people do without a second thought—driving a car, wearing a particular shirt—can put some Black people at risk of everything from condemnation to violence.

Also, when white and Black people gather, white people often unconsciously assert privilege. We take the best seats. We dominate the proceedings. If we are aware of these behaviors, then we can modify them.

**Accept that we've been hurtful:** If we have unintentionally said something racist and been called in, we must not get defensive. It's no excuse that we were unaware that a word or reference could hurt someone. It did hurt someone. Apologize. Thank the person who pointed it out. Don't do it again.

The same goes for insults meant to be considerate. A well-meaning white person might think that asking a person of color where she is from shows polite curiosity. Instead, it may make that person feel like an outsider. Calling oneself "color-blind" may sound like a declaration of virtue. In fact, it implies a lack of recognition of or interest in the identity, culture, and history of people of color.

**Believe Black people's experiences:** Sometimes, white people push back against reports of racist acts. For example, when a Black motorist is stopped and beaten by police officers, a white person might suggest he was not cooperating or cite irrelevant crime statistics. We must stop trying to raise doubts about or mitigate the severity of discriminatory behavior.

**Purge the pejoratives:** Sometimes, white people use racial slurs when quoting someone else, in discussions of the words themselves, or in other circumstances where the intent is not to convey hate. Those words always convey hate. Never use them.

**Practice humility:** White people should get involved in racial-justice work because we sincerely are trying to eliminate racism. Not so we can post photos of ourselves at a demonstration on Facebook. So don't virtue-signal. Don't proclaim yourself an "ally." Just do the work.

**Hold one another accountable:** White people must make ourselves answerable to someone—a friend, a family member, an organization like the ERTF—for fulfilling our commitments to anti-racism work.

Anti-racism work is difficult. White people have resisted for so long. Well-meaning actions have unintended consequences that we must strive, with compassion, to correct. We have been challenged to make a difference.

*Ethical Society members participating in White People Confronting Racism were Barry Dubinsky, Ruth Dubinsky, Stan Horwitz, John Marshall, Sylvia Metzler Henry Pashkow, Nick Sanders, Tara Swartz, and Hugh Taft-Morales.*