

# Race, White Privilege, and the Gospel

---

Pre-Presbytery Workshop  
Presbytery of Chicago  
October 12, 2010

David Esterline, McCormick Theological Seminary  
Jennifer Ikoma-Motzko, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship



# Why work against racism?

---

- Theological foundations
  - God created all people good. To deny some people (because of skin color or language) the privileges other have, is to deny God's good creation.
  - To allow this system—in which some receive advantages simply because of skin color—to go unchecked is to deny that God made all people in God's own good image.



# Race

---

- Race is a social and political reality, *not* a biological or genetic reality.
- There is widespread agreement among scholars that *race*, as understood in the United States, is a social construct – rather than an objective, scientifically or biologically consistent characteristic of a person or group of persons.



# Race

---

How is it that there is such certainty about a concept that is so poorly defined?

There is *no* agreement among scholars about a biological or physiological definition that can be sustained.



# Race

---

“Present-day inequalities between so-called ‘racial’ groups are not consequences of their biological inheritance but products of historical and contemporary social, economic, educational, and political circumstances.”

American Anthropological Association

2006

# Race

---

- Rewards—indicators of well-being—in the U.S. are based on racial group more than on any other characteristic or association.
- The National Urban League’s annual “Equality Index” compares the conditions of black and white Americans in 5 areas (health, wealth, education, social justice, civic engagement), using whites as the standard at 1.0
- For 2010, the index for black Americans = .718



# Race

---

Because the term “race” is so difficult, many people use other terms – such as ethnicity, culture, multicultural, diversity, etc.

The use of such terms adds to the confusion about race and about the terms used in place of race.

# Ethnicity

---

- *Ethnicity* should not be substituted for *race*.
- The two terms have distinct meanings; ethnicity should not be used as a euphemism for race. Such substitution causes confusion and trivializes *ethnicity*.

# Ethnicity

---

- Ethnicity is regularly equated with culture -- “ethnoculture” is often used to refer to a people group.
- Culture = the values, behaviors, customs, and consciousness learned from one’s environment.
- It is culture that creates the sense of attachment and belonging; it is at the center of the concept of ethnic identity.



# Ethnicity

---

- Ethnicity has to do with blood and belonging
- Race has to do with power, privilege, and prejudice



# Racism

---

- Racism is “a system of advantage based on race” (Tatum 2003, 7)
- Prejudice and racism are not the same
- If we define racism as a form of prejudice, we do not have to address issues of privilege and power.



# Racism

---

“Narrowing the concept (of racism) to purposeful individual bigotry is highly advantageous for whites. . . . It renders most whites innocent. . . . And, most important, it protects and naturalizes the racial status quo.” (Brown 2003, 64)



# Racism

---

- Racism in the United States is a social system in which some are advantaged and others are disadvantaged because of skin color.
- We all live in this system, as do our congregations and communities.
- Racism is not primarily about individual prejudice or an individual's beliefs and attitudes.



# White privilege

---

- The un-earned advantages that are enjoyed by whites in this system.
- “White Americans, whether they know it or not, benefit as individuals and as a group from the present social pecking order.” (Brown 2003, 66)



# White Privilege

---

- Whites tend to assume that they are “normal” and that others are “other.” This puts them in the powerful position of defining the world.
- “The sense of whites as non-raced is most evident in the absence of reference to whiteness in the habitual speech and writing of white people.... We speak of blackness or Chineseness of friends, etc., all very genuine, but not of our whiteness or of the whiteness of all the people we know.” (Rothenberg 2008, 10)



# White privilege

---

“Whites need to deal with race as much as any other group and an inability to appreciate this is one more way white supremacy stays unchallenged, even unnoticed.”

Mary Hess / Stephen Brookfield



# Multicultural

---

- Problematic term – almost meaningless without specific, careful definition
- “Multiculturalism maintains the status quo because it generally tends to ignore oppression, white privilege, and white racism.” (Utsey, Gernat, Bolden 2003, 149)



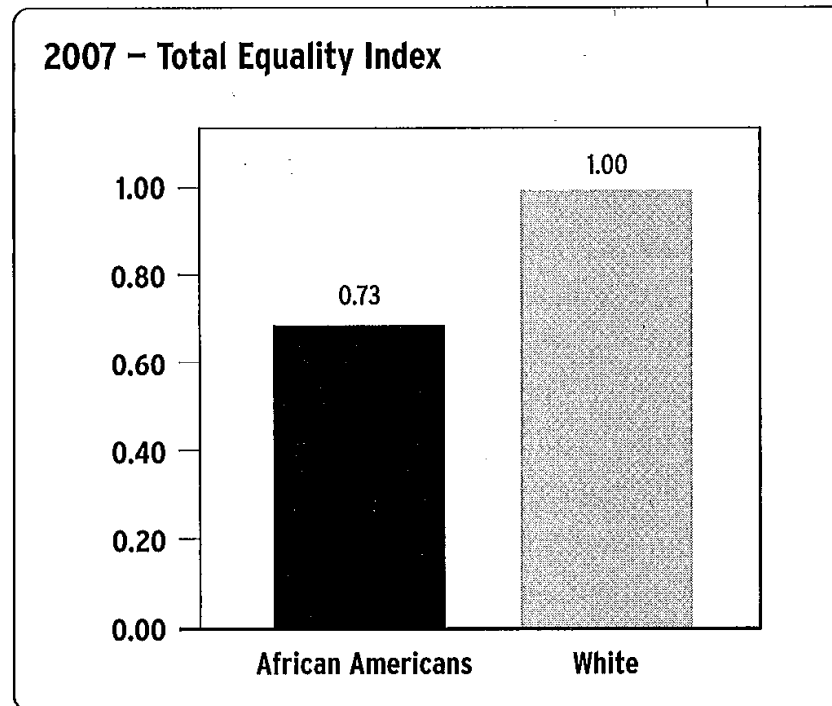
# National Urban League

---

- Annual Equality Index compares the conditions of white and black Americans across a variety of variables.
- <http://www.nul.org/content/tbe-12-state-black-america-2010-responding-jobs-crisis>

# 2007 NUL Equality Index

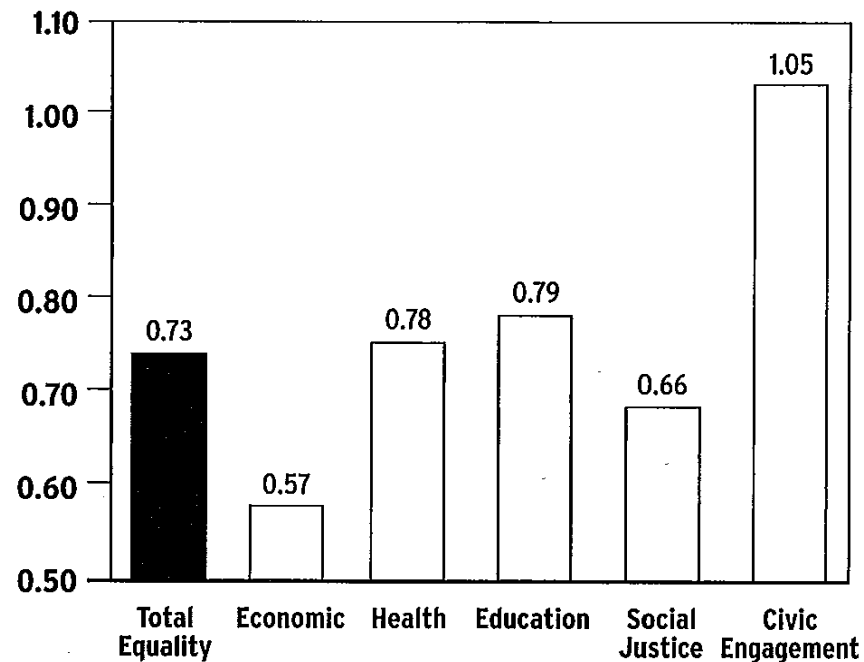
Figure 1



# 2007 Equality Index

Figure 2

2007 – NUL Equality Index (Weighted Index Values)





# 2010 Equality Index

---

- ❑ Black / White comparison: 71.8 / 100
- ❑ Hispanic / White: 75.5 / 100
- ❑ “White privilege” names the unearned advantages that come to whites in this system. It is complex, uneven, and intersects with many other social realities, including gender and class.

# Realities of Cross-Cultural Living

## APPROACHING DIFFERENCES DIAGRAM

