



My Learning Journey

By: Anne Marsham

As a white person responding to the topic of Latinx racism, I have decided to share my process in the hopes that it might inspire other white members of our community to consider their journey.

In contrast to our previous anti-racism newsletter editions, the subject of Latinx racism has had me stalling, with a silently hollow feeling in my chest. I have wondered if this was just a personal reaction, or if I was picking something up about the topic – I think that the answer is a bit of both.

Some of my personal issues are that I have not educated myself enough in the history of Californian and American history. When it comes to learning about racism, my reading has mostly involved anti-racism books that focus on Black and white race relations. Beyond conversations with colleagues and friends about Latinx racism, I feel that I have not done enough research on this issue since finishing graduate school.

In the past few weeks, I have been seeking out articles, books and TV shows that go some way in filling the gaps in my understanding of what racism is like for my Latinx friends, neighbors, colleagues and clients. Watching *Gentefied* on Netflix (Macer et al, 2020-2021) and *Latino Americans* on PBS (Beiber et al, 2013), reading *Ignored Racism, White Animus toward Latinos* (Ramirez & Peterson, 2020) and *Once I was You: a Memoir* (Hinojosa, 2020) has spoken to the void feeling in my chest -- helping me see how the subject of silence is particular to this kind of racism.

It has been most striking to me to learn about the insidious and gas-lighting nature of racism against Latinx people. As Ramirez and Peterson point out in *Ignored Racism* (2020), American bias for immigrants' complete cultural assimilation (including language, religion and traditions) frequently leads to a kind of "racism-ethnicism" by white Americans against Latinx people that can be committed while claiming a belief in equality. Meanwhile, there is a long history of Latinx people being forcibly removed from this country, even when they hold US citizenship; for example, during the Great Depression an estimated 400,000- 2,000,000 Latinx people were deported, some of whom were US citizens (Ramirez & Peterson, 2020). The historic threat of deportation continues – tearing families apart, destroying

livelihoods, and ruining children's lives: often causing a silence among Latinx people that is specific to this oppressive form of racism.

In a town like Santa Barbara, where approximately 1 in 3 people are Latinx, I have felt the temptation to imagine that I "know" Latinx people – to confuse familiarity with knowledge. I have been humbled to begin my journey of learning the deep, complicated history of racism against Latinx people in this country and this state. As I learn more, I start to feel something different in my chest – the earthed feeling of orientation and truth. I also notice something that demands a spaciousness inside me: the knowledge, as a white person, that I can never know what racism is like either in general terms for Latinx people, or in personal terms. No matter how much I educate myself, I can never presume to know the experience of the person in front of me.

References:

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Hinojosa, M. (2020). *Once I was You: A Memoir*. New York, NY: Atria Paperback.

Macer, M., et al. (Executive Producers). (2020-2021) *Gentefied*. [TV series]. MACRO/Sector 7/Anchor Baby/Take Fountain/Yellow Brick Road Productions.

Ramirez, M. D., & Peterson, D.A.M. (2020). *Ignored Racism: White Animus toward Latinos*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.