“If racism was constructed, it can be undone. It can be undone if people understand when it was constructed, why it was constructed, how it functions, and how it is maintained.”
Institutional and systemic racism stem from historic systems of racial privilege and oppression, lack of self-determination in communities of color, institutional gatekeeping, internalized racial oppression and dehumanization and lack of a uniting analytical framework.

Creating a multi-cultural, anti-racism movement requires working from a common set of definitions and an analytical framework for understanding the dynamics of structural racism that empowers communities and serves as the basis for organizing.

Standard training model rooted in communities of color. Presentation and large group discussion as primary learning tools.


Challenge and motivate people to change. Provide a common analytical frame work for community organizing. Develop new, accountable leadership.

Director: Ron Chisom
1444 North Johnson Street, New Orleans, LA 70116 phone: 504-944-2354
The People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond (People’s Institute) was established in 1980 by Ron Chisom and Jim Dunn with a mission to “build a multi-cultural, anti-racist movement for social change.” The People’s Institute training model provides a common language, set of definitions and analytical framework to talk about and work against institutional and systemic racism in the U.S. Over two decades of experience organizing against racism in communities of color have helped shaped the program’s Undoing Racism training model and its assessment, consulting and advanced training services for community leaders.

The program’s training model is rooted in community organizing efforts of the 1960s and 1970s that encouraged citizen activists to reclaim their role in and rights to self-determination. These models provided skills and tools for community action against injustice, but because they were designed and conducted primarily by white leaders, often did not take into account the significance of race, culture and history. The People’s Institute has developed an analysis that grounds community organizing and social justice efforts in cultural contexts and a focus on structural racism.

Organizational Capacity

The People’s Institute has four regional offices, including its headquarters in New Orleans, and additional offices in Berkeley, CA, Brooklyn, NY, and Seattle, WA. Over the past twenty years, the People’s Institute has trained more than 35,000 people through their primary activity—a two-day Undoing Racism training model. The program has ten senior trainers and an additional 30 specialized trainers or trainers-in-training who represent a variety of racial, ethnic and cultural groups. The model explicitly focuses on racism...
within the U.S., but the People’s Institute has adapted it to conduct trainings in Japan, Puerto Rico and other locations around the world.

The program’s training model emerged primarily out of activist work in African American communities and initially focused on black-white dynamics of racism. Both the model’s focus and the organization’s trainers have expanded to include many other people of color. The analytical framework remains binary with a focus on the dynamics between whites and people of color, rather than relations among people of color, and is still strongly influenced by its roots in African American communities and cultures.

The People’s Institute’s work has inspired the development of at least three other organizations that use a similar analytical framework of racism, but have developed unique methods and work with different populations. For example, Challenging White Supremacy Workshop in San Francisco, CA works almost exclusively with young, white community activists and organizers; Crossroads Ministry in Chicago, IL works with a variety of religious, educational and other institutions (see program summaries in this section); and Change work in North Carolina works with non-profit organizations and corporations (see Section Three). These programs occasionally cooperate and share materials with each other.

**Types of Participants**

The People’s Institute offers trainings to a broad range of participants including community organizations, social service agencies, tenant welfare rights organizations, environmental groups, health groups, city planners, schools, parent groups, youth groups, women’s groups, organizers, activists and leaders, as well as institutional gatekeepers—people in roles that determine access to institutional services. The trainings usually involve multi-racial groups, but the program also offers trainings exclusively for particular communities of color. The program rarely works with all-white groups or with corporations because of their resistance to the model’s analysis of racism.

**UNDERSTANDING & INTERVENING AGAINST RACISM**

**Understanding the Problem**

The People’s Institute has a strong sociological, historical, and community organizing approach to understanding and addressing racism. The training model suggests that the problem of racism takes several forms, including: the normative behavior of individuals, the policies of institutions, the invasion of a dominant culture, the medium of language, and the military targeting and enforcement of oppressive policies against people of color.

The People’s Institute asserts that modern racism is embedded in historic systems of oppression that sustain white wealth, power and privilege. The cumulative effects of institutional, cultural, linguistic, military and normative oppression of communities of color over time have been the widespread disempowerment, disorganization and perpetuation of poverty within these communities. The program’s analysis suggests that racism and poverty are intricately linked because people of color do not have control over the institutions and policies that directly impact their lives.

The model suggests that when people learn that they are invisible and worthless, they treat themselves and others like them that way. Internalized oppression has resulted in serious social problems within and between communities of color such as violence, crime, drug addictions, health problems and political apathy. These dynamics also result in the separation and isolation of people of color by class, color and physical location.

The processes of internalized racial inferiority are mirrored in the interlocking dynamic of racial superiority. For many whites, the internalization
of superiority renders the systems of power, privilege and preferential treatment invisible. Reinforced by unexamined systems of individualism, competition and capitalism, a cycle of blaming the victim can be an inherent part of internalized superiority and inferiority.

The model particularly focuses on the role of institutional gatekeepers—or those who speak for, describe, translate, interpret, count and determine institutional access for people of color—in the process of systemic oppression. Gatekeepers are typically accountable to their bosses in institutions rather than the communities that they serve, and usually help maintain rather than change the system. They contribute to depriving oppressed people access to the institutions that control their lives.

Finally, the program suggests that not having a common set of definitions and analytical framework for understanding racism is one of the primary obstacles to unified, anti-racist action. The unclear, fragmented and competing discourses about racism and lack of critical power analysis serve to divide people of color, poor whites and anti-racist activists, and prevent united social movements for equity and justice. The People’s Institute focuses on racism as the defining form of oppression in the U.S. that serves to maintain all other forms of oppression and acts as the most critical barrier to effective community organizing for social change.

Addressing the Problem

The People’s Institute training model suggests that the best way to address these problems is to develop a clear understanding of them. This includes using a common analytical framework and set of definitions as the basis for community organizing. The model recognizes that community organizing and undoing racism are inseparable and suggest that the technical or mechanical skills of organizing are simply not enough for developing a successful liberation movement. Community organizing efforts must be rooted in a common, critical analysis of structural racism in the U.S.

The training model provides education about disempowerment and systemic oppression, accountable leadership in communities and institutions, and organizing across racial lines for social transformation and self-determination. The program emphasizes humanistic values and recognizes the importance of bringing personal experience to understanding racism in order to counteract its dehumanizing effects. However, trainings remain focused on a structural analysis of racism rather than on emotional responses or the personal journey of anti-racism work. The model challenges all participants to be responsible, accountable and active in changing systems of oppression, yet avoids blaming individuals for consciously establishing or perpetuating them.

The People’s Institute model asserts that equitable communities and institutions can only be established and sustained by ethically sound organizers working together with intelligence, integrity and vision. The program requires all its trainers to struggle with and work through issues of racism and difficulties of organizing within their own communities. It also prides itself on being rooted in and accountable to communities of color.

Training Methods

The training model and analysis of racism is consistent across groups and situations, though trainers often use different examples to illustrate their points depending on the participant group. The trainings are clearly structured and use a format of engaging presentations.
and large group discussion. The People’s Institute does not have a written manual or packet of materials for participants describing the goals and methods of the training model, however a publication outlining the Undoing Racism analytical framework is available.

Initial training exercises help participants begin thinking “outside the box” and using a critical lens to examine social structures and dynamics. The training model uses the “foot of oppression” as a metaphor to describe the relationships between institutions, race and poverty. Trainers review important historical dates, legislation, people and policies that have impacted the development of institutional racism in the U.S. They talk about the role of institutional gatekeepers and the increased need for accountability to the communities that institutions serve. Internalized inferiority and superiority are also discussed as important factors maintaining community oppression and fostering social programs based on blame, punishment and denial. The training model explores language and definitions for understanding racism and examines how traditional views of intergroup relations such as “melting pot” theories and “colorblind” policies have ignored and denied racism in the U.S. Final discussions focus on community and institutional transformation and the leadership role of participants after the training.

THEORY OF CHANGE

The program fosters new understandings of racism by educating participants with a common analytical framework that can become the basis for a unified, anti-racism social movement.
# Theory of Practice and Change Flowchart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem Analysis</th>
<th>Intervention Framing &amp; Goals</th>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>How Change Happens</th>
<th>Intended Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Systems of oppression &amp; privilege</td>
<td>Understanding the disempowering web of institutions</td>
<td>Foot of oppression: power analysis</td>
<td>Motivating &amp; challenging people to change structural oppression</td>
<td>Institutional &amp; systemic change toward equity &amp; justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of self-determination</td>
<td>Instilling hope &amp; vision for social change</td>
<td>Thinking outside the box</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Internalized racial inferiority &amp; superiority</td>
<td>Developing accountable leadership</td>
<td>Analysis of &amp; recommendations for gatekeeping</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Institutional gatekeepers</td>
<td>Providing language, definitions &amp; conceptual framework for understanding racism</td>
<td>Definition &amp; deconstruction of race, racism, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of an analytical framework</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>