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WHITE PRIVILEGE

A lecture performance cocommissioned by *Theater* and American Realness festival, New York, January 2018.

The speaker welcomes people into the room and demonstrates “magic ball” technology. The synth ball, a white spheroid mass of plastics with a particle photon embedded at its core, makes sounds. Because of the particle photon device, and a MAX patch written by SLIPPAGE affiliate Quran Karriem, the ball emits sounds according to its movement. The speaker asks if people have read Peggy McIntosh, or if they remember that text.

As the people settle into their seats, the speaker sets up rules of engagement. The speaker says things like this is a bit polemical, but it is not intended as a screed. And this will be participatory; it matters that you are here, and we are here. And this is not a diatribe, it is the recognition of a discourse. A discourse already in motion, long in motion. We will stop for conversation along the way.

Waving the ball a bit, to gather the attention of the gathered, the speaker continues.

Many of you have read “The Invisible Knapsack” text that Peggy McIntosh published in 1988 and 1989. That text offered us modes of thinking that shifted where we were in relationship to each other. I want to set up a three-part exercise for us today. One, what does it mean to experience white privilege? Two, how has white privilege been narrated or defined/explained? Three, what do we do now?

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JANUARY 15, 2018. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. DAY. WE BEGIN.

It enrages me that we still have to do this. That we have to gather together to work through the terms of white privilege, white domination, white supremacy, and our responsibilities to each other as artists and people. That we seem to move so little into understanding our lives as the antiracist, profeminist, queer-affirming beings we aspire to be. That we need these resets, these provocations and disruptions, these moments to swim in reflection.

We find a poignancy of meeting on MLK day, the most American of holidays, so much so that some ignore it, claiming their right to refuse participation. That's fine, I guess; and my own queerness has often kept me from participating in some Black social structures that seem happy to exclude me. I know something about refusing participation. But DENYING ACCESS is something else altogether, and that's one of the terms of white privilege we want to consider today.

Dr. King made many speeches and wrote a lot; he had a lot to say about pretty much everything, including white privilege. Let's start with some of his statements, gathered piecemeal, in twenty-first-century style, from a web search.

1. Dr. King said, "Whites, it must frankly be said, are not putting in a similar mass effort to re-educate themselves out of their racial ignorance. It is an aspect of their sense of superiority that the white people of America believe they have so little to learn."
2. Dr. King said, "There aren't enough white persons in our country who are willing to cherish democratic principles over privilege."
3. He said, "Many white Americans of good will have never connected bigotry with economic exploitation. They have deplored prejudice but tolerated or ignored economic injustice."
4. He said, "Nothing in the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity."
5. And Dr. King said, "The Western arrogance of feeling that it has everything to teach others and nothing to learn from them is not just."

So then, to be just, to be healthy, to be available to difference, to care. To work toward the achievements and capacities of others. The modes of address that white privilege blocks.

Here is our prompt for today:

Is everyone always automatically expected to share the concerns of people of color? Do we all really have to pay attention to race, religion, sexuality, ethnicity? What constitutes "white privilege"? If I'm not interested in being part of some solution, am I really part of the problem? What if I'm a maker/audience/presenter who happens to be interested in love, or formal structure, or myth, or universal qualities of empathy? What am I to do now?

We're bound up here by the magic "as if" of the theater—we will work AS IF WE COULD UNDERSTAND THESE THINGS.

So first, what does white privilege mean?

The speaker sits at a small table to read from a laptop. Nearby, the technologist sits at a sound mixer array, and controls sounds that accompany the following text. The speaker manipulates the ball while reading. The sounds from the ball mix with the soundscape produced by the technologist. The sounds intend to create a compressed atmosphere of difficult, hard-to-grasp momentum, always just out of the control of the speaker. The sounds are electronic wheezings, fits and coughs, foreboding densities of bass and high-frequency squealing. The sounds construct space but emerge behind the text for the most part.

I. WHITE PRIVILEGE IS NEVER HAVING TO SAY YOU'RE SORRY.

About anything. Ever. Never. Pushing me out of the way, cutting the line, demanding attention, expecting service. Wanting, demanding, expecting. Never having to say you're sorry, never needing to express regret or amend wrongs, never compelled to acknowledge complicity that has made your desire possible. White privilege allows for your desire to be possible. White privilege undergirds a narcissism that constructs the world white white white, with whiteness at its center; never acknowledging missteps, bad ideas, racist misogynist policies. Never having to say you're sorry.

Never having to say you're sorry. Like the characters in that whitest of movies, *Love Story*, who hurt each other, then claim, "Love means never having to say you're sorry." White privilege is love that doesn't apologize for the hurting. The love of self, above all others; the love of [white] me before you or us. The love of things as they've always been, in an innocence blanched free of guilt or shame. Love for the simplicity of it all with everyone in their place, out of my way.

Never having to say you're sorry. Or to do much about that saying if it is said; never *having* to react, remodel, revise the gestures, shift the structures, pony up to imagine progress. Never having to pay reparations. Reparations, yes, to actually have to pay for the labor that produced the conditions of the privilege, to pay for the privilege, to pay for the labor that built the buildings and made the economy possible, to pay for the rape and sexual assault visited on Black women, to pay for the methods of cultivating okra, rice, and for the bodies used for medical experiments: syphilis, crack. But more than this, to pay for access to song and dance born in group communion, jazz that improvises like spoken word and emceeding toward a common possibility, dancing to reveal rather than to follow instructions. White privilege stands apart in its whiteness, separate from the Other, never sorry for its singularities, its growing of whites into individual, podlike cells. Each to his own.

Never sorry, never in debt, never owing anything to anyone else. Not sorry for the absence of resources that plague the lives of others. Not sorry for the dearth of educa-

tional tools, for the dissolved access to talented teachers, the possibility to learn beyond what is obvious: that white privilege doesn't care beyond itself.

White privilege is not having to care. That the Black neighborhood, or the Latinx neighborhood, or the reservation doesn't have fresh food, or viable day care, or a hospital, let alone any other healthy ways to eat or reliable access to information—information that could expand into the global moves of contemporary performance. White privilege doesn't have to care, or have cared, or have done anything to rectify the injury, or do anything in particular, now. White privilege is the ability to be uninvolved in the pains that we share, to never need to acknowledge how hurt has happened, or why Black people would want to do ballet or perform Ibsen. White privilege thinks, "If that's your choice, well, no one told you to live in that neighborhood, or dance in that way, or want to take on that role. Did they? Did I? I certainly didn't, so that's on you." White privilege doesn't apologize for its inevitability.

2. WHITE PRIVILEGE IS DOING ANYTHING JUST BECAUSE YOU CAN.

Climbing Mount Everest. Because it's there. Making a dance about shapes, or falling down, or walking in a circle, because you can. Devising theater about a doorknob. Or twinning things and imagining triplets just because you want to see them, or making funny sounds, or trying to hold and disrupt the beat, trying to hold the beat and losing the beat. Or talking about yourself—telling all of your secrets—in a roomful of strangers. White privilege. Taking without asking. Borrowing, you think, as you take and take and take; as you take Indonesian and African music making to make process music, or to make a Ruth St. Denis nautch dance, or a minstrel show, or take a Native headdress to make live art; you take what you call Jamaican dancehall and a parade strut to make some abstraction of Antigone without asking, because you can. You've taken my blues and gone.

White privilege is doing it just because. Without a group to answer to, or create among, not really, when everyone is out for their individuated white selves; the privilege is the assumption that it's okay. It's okay to just go on and see what happens. Without reflection. Or obligation. Or connection. It's okay. Because you can.

Studying belly dance, or flamenco, or an obscure Vietnamese form with a guru willing to teach it; they are willing to teach it, and white privilege responds: "I am willing to learn, and I can, so I do. And maybe I make a piece about it, or use some flamenco steps or rhythms, or a song I liked when I heard it, a gangsta rap that will set the mood for my danced abstraction of precarity, or the Balinese foot slide that I learned in that workshop, that class, that event in the natural history museum with the traditional dancers; I can use that movement in my live art work because, well, why wouldn't I? It's available."

White privilege is assembling a cast of Black performers not because you care for how we might encounter creative craft together, but because you want to see how they look doing your movement. They were available! White privilege is seizing the seem-



White Privilege, 2018.
Photo: Ian Douglas

ing availability and making the most of it. Just because you can. Yes, you can! So why wouldn't you? White privilege thinks, "why not?"

3. WHITE PRIVILEGE IS "MAKING SPACE" FOR DIVERSITY.

Yes, making space. Allowing. Letting them come to the table. Affirmative action. "We want your difference, that beautiful dusky skin, those eyes that hardly open, your nouveau-trans use of 'they' instead of 'her.' We will allow for you here; we will expand our possibilities by being more diverse! We will let one of you write for us; write about the dances we couldn't possibly understand or maybe the ones that we just don't like anyway; we will encourage one of you to curate a performance in the second space, or a diversity series; that's what we need, a diversity series that helps us get to know you. We want you here! We make space for you!"

The benevolent gift of white privilege keeps on giving, constantly reminding us all how primary whiteness truly is by emphasizing all the colors of the rainbow flag, all the Native traditions and traditional forms that existed before whiteness overtook us all, civilized us all into modernism and on beyond that. Whiteness has no real history because it isn't real as a thing, it's real as an activity of exclusionary practices. White privilege tells everyone else how different they can be, how far from the norm. The norm of white. White privilege makes space for difference.

We see the problem immediately: diversity initiatives are designed to revalidate whiteness as an exclusionary center, to restore white primacy by extending a hand to the unfortunates, the unfortunate others who have no way forward except through white

benevolence. White privilege thinks it can solve its own problems through its own methods: beget community by imagining a level playing field, one always impossibly out of reach but somehow worth the effort. One besieged by the “pipeline problem”—“There are just never enough qualified people of color around! If there were more interesting Black artists, we would program them more; or intellectual audiences would be drawn to the work if only it was smarter and more distinctive, more unique.” White privilege imagines a community of artists working alongside each other, working hard to *know* each other across difference, to understand why someone else would want to stretch their leg and foot and hold a balance only to release it within the musical pulse. Why would someone want to dance with music at all? White privilege wonders at the so-called old-fashioned dances that others do, but “if that’s diversity, dammit, then let’s work at creating our community through allowing for it; let’s Bessie-up the cultural dance groups and work harder to make community viable, a community of live artists all after the same thing: a chance to perform in a grand venue! Let’s make the dance community great again by letting everyone have a chance!”

White privilege thinks this. It thinks this is its gift.

But community cannot be produced through labor; it might arrive in a gesture of sharing. Not gifting, but sharing. Let go of the reins. Resist trying to control the manners of participation, and always trying to set the table to decide who sits where. White privilege wants to tell us who gets to sit down next to each other, and when. But we don’t always want to sit next to each other. We don’t always want to.

Sometimes we want to share in setting the table, choosing the menu, setting the agenda, deciding what sorts of conversations we might have. But sometimes, we want to say, “no.” We can choose no, as a valid response to white privilege. We can choose “no.”

A pause for questions and responses.

Let’s stop here for a moment to decompress. We’ll take three questions before we move on. Let’s take a moment to dialogue, let’s take just a moment to hear three questions. We need to hear three questions just to get them into the room.

What do you wonder?

The speaker leaves the ball and its mysterious sounds at the speaker’s table. The speaker approaches the audience with a microphone, and moves among the audience to gather responses.

One?

AUDIENCE Has white privilege assisted you?

The speaker repeats the question: “Has white privilege assisted you?”

Two?

AUDIENCE I wonder how we actually share? How do we get to sharing?

The speaker repeats, “How do we get to sharing?”

Three?

AUDIENCE If we collect minor offenses into an unbearable whole, then what happens?

The speaker repeats, "If we collect minor offenses into an unbearable whole, then what happens?"

Without explanation, the speaker answers all three questions without pause, pointing toward the audience members who asked them:

["Has white privilege assisted you?"] **YES.**

["How do we get to sharing?"] **THROUGH LABOR.**

["If we collect minor offenses into an unbearable whole, then what happens?"] **BLACK LIFE.**

The speaker continues:

It enrages me that we still have to do this. That we have to gather together to work through the terms of white privilege, white domination, white supremacy, and our responsibilities to each other as artists and people. That we seem to move so little into understanding our lives as the antiracist, profeminist, queer-affirming beings we aspire to be. That we need these resets, these provocations and disruptions, these moments to swim in reflection.

Are we swimming yet?

4. PEGGY MCINTOSH

Let's go back to Peggy McIntosh and her essay "Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" to consider what she published in 1989. McIntosh had many, many points to share, some of them less fertile for our purposes today, but all of them of interest. McIntosh is standard reading in our best liberal arts high schools, opening spaces for young whites to start to imagine how to participate in social transformations.

Well, sort of.

You know.

This was all before Facebook, and social media.

Today white people get their news and ideas about the world from ever more random places.

Still.

McIntosh wrote, "As far as I can see, my African American co-workers, friends, and acquaintances with whom I come into daily or frequent contact in this particular time, place and line of work cannot count on most of these conditions." These would be the conditions of daily life. Let's take a stab at listing her understandings of skin color privilege as she experienced it. Let's go through some of her points.

McIntosh wrote, "I can if I wish arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time."

Okay, so not true for me, or most People of Color really, not if we want to actually participate in global economies of performance, or, like, have a job and be able to pay for electricity or communication, or food; we have to be in contact with white people . . . all the time. The fantasy of an all-Black world doesn't leave much space for experimental performance, and even those of us working in Red Hook or at the Studio Museum of Harlem still have to encounter the white hipsters and tourists who go to see everything on offer. The hipsters who consume consume consume without offering anything back, not resources, or even social capital most times. They don't come to learn by witnessing; they just come to take.

Besides, separate but equal was already an even bigger laugh in American history, hahaha; you can have your all-Black shit with out-of-date educational materials, reduced public facilities, and expired foods in the supermarkets. See, without access to capital, and the means to expand material resources exponentially in line with market forces, Black people will never be able to "control" a destiny of how to move through the day.

McIntosh wrote: "2. I can avoid spending time with people whom I was trained to mistrust and who have learned to mistrust my kind or me."

Yeah, not so much this one (*looking around*). That's not even true for me here, now.

McIntosh wrote: "5. I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed."

Okay, so this is one you've probably heard before, and in the 1990s in New York City it was especially true that Shopping while Black was a contact sport, and you would definitely get your feelings hurt.

See, white privilege allows whiteness to own the public space. Everyone else is part of a counterpublic, or a "special event," or a community offering—the biggest irony of all. "The community" are the folx who don't have regular access to the public spaces. For artists, "community work" tends to be code for working with people of color, or more specifically, for anything that doesn't involve whites. Whites don't need community because they own all of it already by default.

And this is again white privilege, to know that the public park is there for you, that the dance studio will be available for your rental without complaints about how you work with sound; that your browsing in stores and spending time through the day in public will not be remarked upon with any special attention. Shop away, shop away.

McIntosh wrote: "7. When I am told about our national heritage or about 'civilization,' I am shown that people of my color made it what it is."

Well, this is true for me if you're talking about entertainment and sports. We have lots of Black people in entertainment and in sports. Some white racists claim that the NBA and the NFL demonstrate "Black privilege" in their insistence on hiring Black players to work in public, as beasts of physical burden, as though the "rewards" of competitive physical distress could somehow align with an opportunity denied whites.

Now, it could be, though, that we are talking about art, and we could note that American invention is jazz, sourced from Black musicality. That improvisation—and

the aesthetic drive to figure out form in collaboration with the present moment—is the major contribution of American culture, if you will, and at the heart of pretty much everything from the Browns—Ron and Trisha—through the Mercés, the Twylas, the Georges, and the Bills—Forsythe and T. Jones. But what I think McIntosh is after here, if I turn the argument around a bit, is the idea that people of color productively undergird how we understand America to operate. This is trickier: if we're talking about patience, perseverance against all odds, an indelible ability to survive; of course, this is what Black America continues to demonstrate to the world. A sort of “and still we rise” possibility. But fuck that, we just got a museum on the National Mall last year. Just bullshit—just *last year*. And half of the museum tells the story of Black subjugation, confirming that, yes, the shit has been fucked up from the start. That's what we get—a museum about how fucked up shit has been. As if we don't know from trying to find a job or a place to show creative work.

McIntosh wrote: “13. Whether I use checks, credit cards or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial reliability.”

Okay so just a couple days ago, my partner writes a check to a guy for some work he did nearby. When the guy goes to cash the check, the bank calls my partner, to be sure that he had written the check. Of course the guy is Black. This was three days ago! In North Carolina, granted, but still, bullshit.

McIntosh wrote: “15. I do not have to educate my children to be aware of systemic racism for their own daily physical protection.”

So my niece has four sons, four beautiful boys aged four to twelve. She's driving them to the drug store in Indianapolis, Indiana, the place where I grew up. This is last month. The boys are arguing about something, the two oldest ones, and she pulls into the drug store parking lot. Their fight continues, and transforms into some yelling and arm grabbing, and when the car is parked and turned off, they loosen their seat belts, jump out, and chase each other, yelling and pushing, taunting. My niece freaks out. She stops them, and gathers them near the car, with the younger two joining the older fighters. Near tears, she explodes, “Don't you understand that you can't do that here? These people don't know you; they'll think you're wild and call the police. You can't do that here.” She cries a bit. The boys are stunned into submission. She is an attorney; she supervises a unit. She lives in the suburbs. She has four beautiful boys. She cries a bit. She notices a white woman looking at the five of them. She wonders if the white woman will accuse her of abusing her children. She cries a bit. This is last month. The boys are aged four to twelve.

What they learn from this incident has to do with an omnipresent force of domination that seeps into their relationships with each other willy-nilly. That polices them in their working through of love among each other as a family. That infuses their lives with a background noise of dread and incipient violence. The boys are age four to twelve.

If you've ever wondered why black music is so loud, it's partly to drown out the

incessant sounds of white supremacy lurking just behind, the ever-present threat of a hauling-off and the unpredictable loss of personal control. Trayvon Martin, Sandra Bland. That still happens. The music dulls the insistent threat.

At the end of her list, Peggy McIntosh writes that she repeatedly forgot each of the realizations of her privilege until she wrote it down. For her, white privilege turned out to be an elusive and fugitive subject.

Oh yes, fugitive, in the way that Black gesture is fugitive and hard to catch; a little bit out of reach, on the run, going, going, gone. Trying to be away from prying eyes, away from the eyes of the carceral state, from the police eyes, from popo, bearing down, chasing, dominating. Suppressing. Subjugation.

And in this white privilege I can be surprised that I didn't know; "how could I have known? How could I have known? I kept forgetting . . . what it might be like for them; I kept forgetting what it might be like for them; I kept forgetting." But when does this become a willful ignorance?

SEE, WHITE PRIVILEGE IS PRETENDING NOT TO UNDERSTAND
THE PROBLEM — ANY PROBLEM.

Economic inequality, racial stigmatization, lack of sustained transformative experiential possibilities. Is it fair to say that the invisible knapsack was only a surprise to the people who never bothered to think about it before? Unearned privilege? Passive assets? Skin-color privilege?

White privilege endorses this naïveté, this sense of shock that once again centers whiteness as the way to recognize the world. Of course, Black people knew. Latinx



White Privilege, 2018.
Photo: Ian Douglas

people knew. Queer people knew, but not all the gays or lesbians. Asian, so-called Oriental, and Indigenous people knew, but somehow the whites didn't know; the white privilege acted as a blinder to everything including itself.

Unearned privilege feeds into the notion that labor produces value, so some claim that white privilege—which is unearned—must not be worth much. Not true. Unearned privilege is all the stuff you get based on how you look, and how others see you. License to ill. To ill on others. To swell up, to claim space, to mobilize the social services—however meager they may be—and to align with the police and the systems of justice.

If you have any doubt about how powerful these privileges have been and still are, consider the history of passing for white that drove thousands of people of color to deny everything outside of white. Passing is a practice—still done—where people claim only the white identities that allow for specialized services and attentions. People who pass disavow all of their family members who might associate them with the difficulties of colored life. Passing, they move into better-resourced neighborhoods with higher average incomes and stronger social services. They move through time, from the “whites only” sections of all manner of public facility in Jim Crow USA, to job interviews and successful status as reliable workers in professional circumstances today. Passing, when possible, allows some to shift the scrutinizing brutalities of Black life away from themselves. And onto those whose skin confirms difference.

White privilege allows a license to be ignorant of these histories; it allows for a willful resistance to knowing. But on your skin, you knew. You always knew. This is the “pretending,” the masking, the hiding. Pretending it's okay to ignore the effects you have in the world next to others who have considerably less.

(whispering) IT CAN BE SO HARD TO BE WHITE, THERE'S SO MUCH TO THINK ABOUT.

Somehow, this willful ignorance becomes the movement toward white fragility and #whitetears. “I just never knew! How could I have known? I kept forgetting!” Unfortunately, it doesn't surprise many of us, this unbearable willingness to be naive in the face of racialized inequality and blank injustice.

McIntosh wrote: “32. I have little fear about ignoring the perspectives and powers of people of other races.”

Well there it is. White privilege is permission to ignore. To ignore that people of color have invariably attained a level of superproficiency of craft before we are anywhere near the stages of experimental venues or regional houses. White privilege can ignore the powers and perspectives of people of other races. To ignore the powers. At your own peril.

A pause for questions and responses.

Ok let's pause, let's pause and decompress, let's have six questions or ideas. What do you wonder, what do you think?

AUDIENCE How are we going to deal with the trap of so much of the work white folks are doing is just learning the right words to not sound offensive?

One.

AUDIENCE We think of privilege as a subsidy. Isn't that a problem?

Two.

AUDIENCE Wherever you are is where we are, yes?

Three.

AUDIENCE Due to the extent of the bloodshed and brutality, does the term *privilege* go far enough?

Two more.

AUDIENCE Is there a way to use privilege in the interest of others?

One more.

AUDIENCE Where's the line or area between sitting back and listening, and doing something?

The speaker answers the questions out of order, pointing toward the audience members who asked.

One: We will ask for more—much more. Two: Yes. Three: Thank you for coming along. Four: Language sucks. It's totally inadequate, it doesn't go far enough. Six: The line is showing up here, showing up more and more clearly. Are you getting angry yet? Five: And yes, to use privilege in the interest of others? I sure the fuck hope so. Yeah.

The speaker continues.

It enrages me that we still have to do this. That we have to gather together to work through the terms of white privilege, white domination, white supremacy, and our responsibilities to each other as artists and people. That we seem to move so little into understanding our lives as the antiracist, profeminist, queer-affirming beings we aspire to be. That we need these resets, these provocations and disruptions, these moments to swim in reflection.

I'm feeling a flailing.

Let's turn to strategies. White privilege. What to do?

FIRST, CHECK YOURSELF. RESIST EXERCISING YOUR PRIVILEGE.

STOP ORGANIZING THE WORLD AS YOU WILL AND ASSIGNING

VALUE ACCORDING TO WHIM.

Become vigilant. White people consistently think of themselves as morally just—average, but a little better than that, hard workers who deserve any scrap of good fortune that appears. This may be so, and maybe some do deserve whatever comes, while others don't. But you are also always willing to take the best jobs, to step in and orga-

nize, take on leadership, and “make things happen,” you think, working from your place of moral integrity and good will toward all. Your leadership isn’t always helpful.

White racism and white privilege are not the same thing, but they each bring forward the other. Racists see difference as a means to ranking, and privilege encourages racist behavior.

You become the presenters and the curators, to decide who stays and who goes, what’s in and now, what’s one and done. You decide, based on your fine taste and your experience which you gained, of course, because you had the opportunity to intern, to shadow, to work for little pay, to be in the room long before any of the people of color.

Now in charge, your interests are to become those of any in your path. You privately confess that you think the ethnic and identity-based creative projects are less worthy than the grand experiments in form that might be your favorites. Programming, you still make room for only one, and he’s usually a dude. Men are easier to work with.

White privilege allows for this sense of propriety, this sense of innate, verifiable authority, this permission to organize everyone else and decide who belongs where and when.

What to do? Resist. Be vigilant. Get in the room where the action is happening without a white center and witness its process. Go see new work. Black work. Latinx work; Native, Blasian queer trans work. Get in the room. You don’t have to understand the work. That takes time. And a ton of energy. Go anyway. Begin the process.

Look, you’ve got to get past worrying that you’re going to use your “magic white force” if you show up, witness, listen, and participate according to what might be asked of you. Understanding how systems of oppression operate needs to lead to resistance against their continuation. Of course, check yourself.

SECOND, RESIST THE SYSTEM THAT ALLOWS FOR UNWARRANTED
OPPRESSIONS — THAT ALLOWS FOR WHITE PRIVILEGE AND
BLACK SUBJUGATION.

What is this, a pep rally? You know this already—be vigilant. Do the thing that needs to be done; learn to listen. Learn to evaluate tone, and recognize movement. There’s so much movement; become a part of it, and hone your willingness to call bullshit—white bullshit. Yes, be bold, but resist taking up the space that will likely be better tended by others. A cutting dismissal of white supremacist behavior has great effect in its volume, especially when it might be proffered repeatedly at its perpetrators. #MeToo #Time’sUp. Being afraid helps no one and becoming paralyzed is probably indulgent.

McIntosh wrote: “Whiteness protected me from many kinds of hostility, distress and violence, which I was being subtly trained to visit, in turn, upon people of color.”

Yes, stop that. Call it out. Call bullshit. What else can you do?

Let’s hear it. What can you do? Let’s go for it.

AUDIENCE Drop the judgment.

Drop the judgment, go!

AUDIENCE Give people some of your money.

Give your money, go!

AUDIENCE Call it out.

Call it out! Go!

AUDIENCE Don't confuse white-ing with being.

Don't confuse white-ing with being, yes. Go!

AUDIENCE Educate yourself.

Educate, go!

AUDIENCE Labor . . .

Labor, go!

AUDIENCE Think about it.

Go!

AUDIENCE Listen.

Go!

AUDIENCE Try something else.

Go!

Go!

Alright.

The speaker gestures with the ball, then continues.

It enrages me that we still have to do this . . . [*the speaker cuts off abruptly, unwilling to repeat the text yet again.*] Let's wrap it up.

THE DISAVOWAL — WHITE PRIVILEGE AS PERMISSION TO ESCAPE.

White privilege is a structuring logic that expands to encompass any who would engage its assets. Meaning: watch closely now, it's not only whites who exercise this claim of an unearned advantage, who turn contempt onto other people of color and especially Black Americans. Watch closely now; ethnic distresses encourage some to mimic white mistreatments of Black folk in contexts of Asian difference, Cuban identities, Aboriginal lives, and the practices of religious dissidents. And immigrants, referred to as "refugees" when they are colored. Watch closely: African immigrants claim their "not Black American-ness" too easily, hoping to avoid the stigmatizations that circumscribe Black

American life; and in turn, white critics and presenters propel African artists in front of Black Americans fomenting even more chaos. Watch closely: they all hope to avoid the too-difficult conversations that need to happen around Black life. Watch closely: white privilege forces us into this comparative frenzy, insisting we stay in our lanes and oppose the possibilities for Black life to emerge as a joyful possibility and an affirmative operation of social encounter.

But let's not drown just yet. Not today.

The most heinous property of white privilege is its ability to disavow, to stop paying attention, to turn a blind eye, to ignore, to pretend it doesn't exist. But more than that: not to just pretend, not to just turn a blind eye, but to disavow, to actually determine that the people don't deserve to be here and to determine that people are 3/5 a person; to determine that the people are not people, but rather fodder for the carceral state; to disavow life to encourage the addictions and the structures of disease and cycles of misery in our so-called shithole circumstances.

And circumstances are shitty and running over with puss and neglect so we make trap music about the trap in response to the disavowal and we chase joy and dance spirit in spite of the disavowal and we love and hate and prove it somehow in defiance of the disavowal.

White privilege calls for defiance, it calls for the shaming of its willful continuance and its ignorant embrace. We call it out here, to note its awkward contours and its atrocious disciplining of us all, propelling whites toward a false sense of common bond, one only felt in its savage dismissal of our shared humanity as a common cause.

What are we to do now? To dismantle oppression might be to open toward care. Nonnarcissistic, empathetic care. Care in listening and watching, sharing and shutting down the bullshit; time's up motherfuckers—you don't get just because you used to have. The ship we're all on now is listing, tilting toward the disaster of smashing on the rocks, leaving scavengers as survivors when we do know better. Yes you have to be part of the solution, and yes you are probably part of the problem; no you can't just do what you used to do, and yes the waters are rough rough rough. The landscape has changed; the terrain is different, and time's up. The challenge is clear: we rewrite the scenario to prevent the ocean bile from swallowing us whole, we learn to listen and share without taking and dominating. We care. Dismantling white supremacy, we reveal more spaces of engagement across experience and through particularity rather than inference. We care. Dancing toward a shared possibility of multiplicities, of many of us as we need to be in our encounters; we begin to right the wrongs that constructed white privilege, we care. Experimenting in performance, we loosen its pale death-grip on our ineffable capacity to keep knowing more, and to work with our difference as a pivot toward understanding what it really means to give a fuck. We care.

Dismissing white privilege, we care.

We care.

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