



I N T R O D U C T I O N

... The Right to Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.
—U.S. Declaration of Independence

The Happiness Machine—A Fable

Once upon a time there was a kingdom of people who pursued happiness. Nothing was more important to them than being happy. The happier they became, the happier they wanted to be.

The source of the people's happiness was a magic Happiness Machine. Whenever the people felt unhappy they would pour their troubled feelings into the Happiness Machine. The magic machine would melt their feelings down and purify them. The residue of their troubles became dross, and the dross was drained away and dumped into a distant part of the kingdom. The people would take their purified feelings and go away singing and feeling happy again. They were called the "Happy People."

As the years and centuries went by, the Happy People became happier and happier because of the wonderful effects of the Happiness Machine.

There was only one problem. Another group of people lived in a distant part of the kingdom where all the dross was dumped. The dross made them very unhappy. They were called the "Unhappy People." The more dross that was dumped on them, the unhappier they became. However, the Unhappy People were not permitted to use the Happiness Machine, because the one thing the magic machine could not do was purify its own dross.

The Unhappy People complained to the Happy People about the problems they had with the dross. But the Happy People ignored their complaints. When they were confronted with the troubling results of their happiness, the Happy People simply took their troubled feelings to the Happiness Machine, and it made them happy again. It was easy to believe that it was not the dross of their own troubles that made other people unhappy. Rather, they convinced themselves that the Unhappy People were just incurably unhappy and that they had nobody but themselves to blame for their unhappiness.

It was not long before the Unhappy People began to protest more insistently about their situation. They organized marches and demonstrations. They demanded that the dross be removed from their part of the kingdom. And they demanded a fair share of happiness for their people. But the Happy People turned a deaf ear to their protests, which only served to make the Unhappy People unhappier, and they protested all the more.

Finally, the Happy People could no longer ignore the protests. They used force to put down the protesters, and arrested and jailed the leaders. They passed laws and organized military force to control the Unhappy People. Many of the Unhappy People were killed. This only made them unhappier. They began to plot and plan how they could destroy the Happiness Machine.

The conflict and tension caused a severe drain on the Happy People's happiness. To make it worse, some of the Happy People were becoming increasingly troubled about the way the Unhappy People were being treated. All these new troubles made the Happiness Machine work even harder, and as a result even more dross was produced. They had to build an even bigger and better Happiness Machine to take care of the happiness needs of the Happy People. Consequently, the dross was piled higher and higher and spread farther and farther into other parts of the kingdom, which made more and more Unhappy People. It was not long before the Unhappy People were in a constant state of rebellion.

Then a new and even greater danger arose. The Happiness Machine had become so large and productive that there was no place left in the kingdom to put the dross. The piles of dross crept closer and closer to the homes of the Happy People and to the place where the Happiness Machine was operating. There was an ominous threat that the dross would back up into its own machine, and the machine would self-destruct. Now the Happy People were troubled not

only by the rebellion of the Unhappy People, but also by their own Happiness Machine.

The new danger caused even greater internal troubles among the Happy People. Some people began to sorrowfully predict that the Happiness Machine would soon self-destruct. Others suggested that the only alternative was to build an even bigger Happiness Machine in order to deal with the crisis they were facing. Others began to see that the Happiness Machine was not the solution to their problems, but the cause. They wanted to reduce the size of the Happiness Machine, or even dismantle it altogether. Some even began to wish that they could join together with the Unhappy People and build a new society together without the help of Happiness Machines. . . .

The end of this story has not yet been written. This book is an invitation to readers to see themselves as part of the story and to help write its ending.

The Dross of Racism

As the reader has no doubt already recognized, this fable is about us and about real-life Happiness Machines. The real-life Happiness Machines are the structures and institutions of U.S. society. They belong to us, and they work for us. They produce food and clothing, cars and housing, resorts and recreation, law and order. Their purpose is to make us happy.

But, just as in the fable, our real-life Happiness Machines also produce unhappiness. They produce “dross.” They produce poverty and segregated ghettos, unemployment and underemployment, and inadequate housing, health, and education. The very same systems that create and sustain our standards of living also create and perpetuate wretched conditions for millions upon millions of people, not only in the United States, but throughout the world as well. This fable is, in fact, no fable at all, but a story about the real world in which you and I live.

The subject of this book is racism. The “Happy People” in the fable represent the white society in the United States, and the “Unhappy People” represent people of color who suffer from white racism. Racism remains one of the most serious issues we need to face in the twenty-first century. Many, perhaps most, of us were hoping that problems of racial injustice in the United States had been sufficiently dealt with in the 1960s and in the years immediately after the civil rights movement drew to a close. We believed—or wanted to believe—that the social conditions of people of color, such as housing, education, employment, and health, would now be improving. We believed—or wanted to believe—that the increasing numbers of people of color in elected

offices, media programming, and other public positions were a sign that things were truly changing. But it has become clear that these changes were more illusory than real. Racism still plagues not only the individual attitudes and behavior of white people but also, far more seriously, the public systems and institutions of white society.

I wrote this fable of the Happiness Machine more than thirty years ago, and used it in the introduction to two previous books: *Liberating Our White Ghetto* and *Dismantling Racism: The Continuing Challenge to White America*. Now, although there have been many surface changes for the better, I believe the underlying problems have remained the same or grown worse, and the basic message of the fable has not changed. One hundred years ago, W. E. B. Du Bois wrote in the introduction to *The Souls of Black Folk*, “the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line.”¹ Du Bois’s prophetic insight can be extended as well to the twenty-first century—the question of the color line is still central to and inseparable from all other social and political issues in our nation.

My purpose in writing this book is to examine how racism continues to function in the United States in the early part of the twenty-first century. I will explore the ways in which progress has been made toward racism’s eradication over the past fifty years, and I will describe the ways in which racism continues unabated, even assuming new forms and disguises that make it more dangerous than ever. Most importantly, I will focus on the continuing task of dismantling racism, and the question of how we can work to bring systemic racism to an end and replace it with a racially just, multicultural society.

The Happiness Machine and Current Reality

As I write this book near the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, there are three current news stories that provide vivid examples of the need to examine carefully current reality in the context of the story of the Happiness Machine. I believe that contemporary expressions of racism and the struggle to overcome racism can be found at the roots of each of these news stories.

News Story # 1: “Katrina” and the City of New Orleans

On August 30 and September 24, 2005, two hurricanes named Katrina and Rita, the most destructive to ever strike the continental United States, slammed into the coasts of Louisiana and Mississippi, killing thousands of persons, causing homelessness for millions, and destroying billions of dollars in property. Eighty percent of the city of New Orleans was inundated and

destroyed, requiring the city to be virtually abandoned for months and to face years of rebuilding.

Normally, this terrible tragedy would be classified as a “natural disaster,” its primary distinguishing characteristic being only its enormity. However, the classification of the tragedy as a “natural disaster” has been vehemently and angrily rejected by many people who view the devastation as quite unnatural and point to forces much more chaotic than the forces of nature. The basis for this reclassification as an “unnatural disaster” is the charge of racism in the preparedness, response, and recovery of New Orleans. During the weeks, months, and years of recovery, there have been—and continue to be—charges and countercharges, accusations and denials, investigations and counter-investigations, and acrimonious debate centered on the issue of racism.

News Story #2: The Immigration Crisis

It has been simmering for decades, but in 2006, the overheated political debate with regard to an estimated twelve million undocumented people in the United States began to boil over, significantly influencing preparations for the presidential elections in 2008. Legislative proposals to arrest and deport “illegal aliens” and to build hundreds of miles of walls along our national borders were countered with millions of people demonstrating in cities and towns across the nation, protesting unfair treatment of “undocumented workers.”

As with the story of Katrina, at the roots of this story we hear angry charges of racism. The majority of the undocumented people are Latinos/Hispanics, particularly Mexicans, who cross our nation’s southern border to work in fields and factories in unfilled low-income jobs that few others are willing to do. In retaliation for their presence, laws have been created to deprive undocumented people of health care, police protection, housing, education, and even driver’s licenses. The results of these actions, along with attacks based on language, accents, culture, heritage, and skin color, are felt indiscriminately by all Latinos/Hispanics—documented or not.

News Story #3: Terrorism in Our Land

It is a story now so much a part of us, we refer to it in shorthand: “WTC on 9/11.” On September 11, 2001, the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City were demolished by two hijacked commercial jet airliners deliberately flown into the buildings. Simultaneously, another hijacked plane was deliberately flown into the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., and a fourth hijacked plane, apparently intended to be smashed into the White House, was retaken by a rebellion of heroic passengers and crashed in a rural area in Pennsylvania. The resulting devastation caused by these horrendous events is immeasurable: 2,000 people killed, billions of dollars in property destruction,

and the traumatic shock of a nation that has seldom experienced violent attacks from an outside enemy. The continuing effects of this story are not only global confrontations, but also the escalation of domestic racism toward Arabs and Middle Eastern peoples in the United States.

In ways that are similar to the news stories of Hurricane Katrina and the immigration crisis, 9/11 magnifies a view of the world with the reality of racism at the center. Many people from Arab and Middle Eastern countries, as well as people from underdeveloped and poverty-stricken countries around the world, increasingly consider the United States and the Western world an enemy of justice and freedom and a primary cause of decades and centuries of poverty and oppression. They also see a great deal of accuracy in comparing the horrific and unjustifiable attacks on 9/11 with the equally horrific and unjustifiable invasion of Iraq and other military and economic attacks in other parts of the world by the United States and their allies.

These three stories have common threads—the color-filled threads of racial tensions and conflict between white people and people of color, domestically and globally. And they clearly demonstrate what can be also demonstrated in a thousand similar stories: first, that racism has not disappeared; and second, that the continuing struggle to end racism is as relevant as today's newspaper. The story of the Happiness Machine is the story of our own lives.

A Book for White People

This book on racism is written especially for white people and about white people, and it is written by a white person. It is a book about our problem of white racism. More often than not, books about racial problems are about people of color—about African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos/Hispanics, and Arab Americans. Those books are usually concerned especially with the problems that racism causes for people of color.

The purpose of this book is different. The central focus of this book is *not* about how racism affects people of color. Rather, the primary subject is how racism is caused by and how it affects white people and the predominantly white institutions and culture of our white society. I believe that we who are white need to come to new understandings about ourselves and about our racism, and we need to take responsibility for bringing racism to an end. The two primary goals of this book are, first, to help white people understand how racism functions and how it is perpetuated in our homes, schools, churches, and other institutions; and second, to help equip white people to combat and dismantle racism and to help build an antiracist/multicultural society.

While this book is addressed to white people, it is not an attack on white people; it is not based on accusations or blame, and does not seek to produce

guilt. As I hope will become clear, my primary thesis about racism is that we are all “prisoners of racism,” people of color and white people alike. Almost every leader in the struggle against racism, from Frederick Douglass to Martin Luther King Jr. and from Mahatma Gandhi to Nelson Mandela, has emphasized that racism is as debilitating to white people as it is to people of color, and that the goal of freedom is for all people. By the time the reader reaches the end of this book, I hope there will be new clarity on how we can all reach this goal.

And Also a Book for People of Color

Although this book is written primarily to white people and about white reality, people of color are also invited to read this book—if for no other reason than to assess whether the understanding of racism presented here corresponds to your own experience and understanding. The underlying analysis of racism presented here does not originate with me or any other white person, but has been taught to me by people of color, who are the true experts on racism. I hope that I have been able to maintain faithfulness to this understanding of racism that comes from the perspective of people of color, while applying it to the reality of white people.

During the past fifty years, my principal teachers about racism have been African Americans, and my predominant experience with struggles for racial justice has been in the context of African American communities. I have been profoundly affected by the centuries-long history of African American people surviving slavery and postslavery racism in the United States; and even more, I have been influenced by the central leadership that African Americans have given—and are still giving—to the struggle to end racism in our nation.

More recently, it has also become very important for me to learn how racism in the United States affects other communities of color. Native Americans, Latinos/Hispanics, Asian Americans, and Arab Americans have also been devastated for centuries by racism and have struggled valiantly for racism’s defeat. As I have gained experience in and learned from all communities of color, I have come to a greater understanding of the complexity of multiracial oppression in our society, as well as the interrelatedness and interdependence of their separate struggles.

In my personal strivings to become an effective antiracist teacher and organizer, there has been nothing more important than listening to, learning from, and following the leadership of people of color, and to be accountable to people of color in my understanding of racism. I am especially very clear that it is neither the right nor the role of a white person to speak for people of color. Thus, wherever in this book I describe the reality of people of color, I

try through direct quotes or through footnotes to attribute these descriptions appropriately to authentic sources of people of color. Where I have failed to do this, or where I have inaccurately heard, understood, or described the reality of people of color or the reality of racism from the perspective of people of color, I accept full responsibility.

The Work of Crossroads Ministry and People's Institute

The analysis of racism in this book is the product of collective work by many, many people. It especially reflects years of efforts by two antiracism training organizations: Crossroads Ministry, located in Chicago, and People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, located in New Orleans. Both of these organizations have developed significant new ways of teaching and organizing to understand and dismantle racism. The table of contents and chapter sequence of this book directly reflect the outline and progression of a Crossroads Ministry anti-racism training workshop, and are also quite similar in outline to a People's Institute training workshop.

The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond was cofounded in 1980 by Jim Dunn and Ron Chisom, and Chisom is now its director. Although the People's Institute addresses the experience and issues of all communities of color, its leadership is primarily African American, and its analysis is rooted principally in the African American experience.

Crossroads Ministry, which I cofounded in 1986 and directed for eighteen years, is now codirected by Robette Dias and Chuck Ruehle. While the work of Crossroads, like that of People's Institute, began with an analysis principally rooted in the African American experience, it has a multiracial focus and seeks to address the ways in which issues of racism affect all people of color.

During the past three decades, thousands upon thousands of people have benefited from the work of these two organizations, and have been equipped with analyzing and organizing skills to work for community and institutional transformation and the building of an antiracist society. It is my deepest hope that readers of this book will explore further involvement and action in dismantling racism by connecting with the work of these two organizations. Information on both can be found in the resource section at the end of this book.

Language and Terminology

Since this book is written by a single author, but at the same time seeks to reflect the collective experience of many people, I have found it a little difficult

to keep my pronouns straight. The reader will note at times the alternating use of “I” and “we” in reference to the voice that is trying to communicate this analysis. It is impossible for me to write in the first person without needing to also reflect the wisdom and authority of many people from the past and present who have informed me and who have spoken to me with a collective voice. Nevertheless, practical circumstances have dictated that this book be written by a sole author, and although this sole author accepts responsibility for errors and weaknesses in the content, I want readers to read and feel the wisdom and authority that comes from a collective analysis of racism.

Likewise, since I am particularly addressing white people about white racism, sometimes the “we” of the text refers to white readers, and sometimes “we” refers to all people reading the book. I have attempted to make the pronouns clear in the context of a given page or paragraph,

Other terms used in this book require some clarification. There are constant changes in U.S. society as to the commonly accepted names used to denote various racial groups. In the chapters that follow, there is extensive discussion of how the current uses of these terms evolved, how they are in the process of constantly changing, and why it is important to define and use these terms in a respectful and accurate way.

Prior to deeper exploration in the book itself, however, it is important to note here in the introduction that the term “people of color” will be used (rather than terms like “minorities” and “nonwhites,” which are neither accurate nor respectful) to represent the five major racial groups other than white people: African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos/Hispanics, and Arab Americans. The use of a unifying term like “people of color” represents a deeply felt need expressed within all of these groups to build unity and strength among themselves, and to no longer allow racism to divide them from each other and make them compete with each other for the leftovers of a racist society.

The term “white people” is used to designate all people who are not people of color, and in particular to describe the descendents of Europeans who are citizens of the United States. As will be explored more deeply, it was by legally defining “white people” and by the racial empowerment of all who fit this definition that the roots of structural racism in the United States were formed and sustained.

Each of the six major racial groups have other alternative names that I could have chosen to use. In consultation with colleagues of color, I have tried to use the presently most commonly accepted name within each group. The term “Latinos/Hispanics” is representative of an almost equal split in opinion at the time of this writing between the name “Latinos” or “Hispanic Americans.”

At any moment, there may be differences or shifting of opinions as to the best terms to be used. As I will describe further within the book, the changing of names is often a very positive sign of struggle with identity and especially a struggle within each group to name themselves and not allow others to name them. By the time this book is being read, new names may be evolving, while old names used here may have been discarded. Even the term “people of color” is likely to be replaced by a more helpful or useful successor. In the naming or describing of people of color in this book, I have done my best to be faithful to the counsel of colleagues of color. If I have erred or offended anyone by terminology or description, however, I accept personal responsibility and ask for patience and forgiveness. I especially apologize if any of the terms I have used begin to take on an offensive meaning.

Other “Isms”—

The Happiness Machine’s Multiple Consequences

While dealing with the subject of racism, we need to be aware that racism is not the only social problem of our society. The dross of our Happiness Machines produce other “isms” such as sexism, heterosexism, classism, nationalism, militarism, anti-Semitism, and environmental pollution—all of which cause tremendous suffering and endanger humanity’s existence. The same fable could be used to describe the social reality of poverty-stricken people, women and children, gays and lesbians, oppressed religions, and political domination throughout the world. All of these social problems are interwoven into a single fabric of oppression, and they are not easily disentangled from each other. However, it is not possible to simply analyze and resist “oppression in general.” Just as this book addresses racism, each of these other “isms” must be separately analyzed and addressed.

At the same time, even when we are working to address any one of these other “isms,” it is important to understand how each of them are affected by racism. Wherever one goes, whatever the issue, whatever stone is overturned in the field of social turmoil, we encounter the persistent and ever-present problem of racism. An understanding of racism is needed, therefore, not only by those who are directly involved in issues of racial justice, but also by those who work with all the other issues of justice and social change. At various points in the book, I have made special effort to further explore the interrelationship of racism with other issues of oppression.

Even more importantly, the fable of the Happiness Machine is an international story. It does not only apply to life within the United States. The Happiness Machines and their dross have been globalized; they are every-

where. And struggles for freedom and equality are also taking place everywhere. Not just in the United States but all around the world—in every country on every continent—efforts are being made to end the destructiveness of the Happiness Machine. The struggle for racial and economic justice can not be successful anywhere if it is not successful everywhere. Although the focus of this book is on racism in the United States, it must be read in the context of struggles with all issues of political and economic injustice everywhere in the world.

Finally, an explanation is needed about anti-Semitism and how it is related to a book on racism. Anti-Semitism has produced centuries-long terrifying oppression of Jews throughout the world, including in the United States. Anti-Semitism must even today be constantly and vigorously resisted. However, I believe it is important to make a distinction between racism and anti-Semitism. In the United States context, Jewish identity is usually understood in religious, cultural, and national terms, rather than racial terms. In fact, there are Jews of every race, both in the United States and throughout the world. Nevertheless, as I will indicate further in chapter six, Jews have from time to time also been racialized in ways that subjected them to explicit racist oppression in the United States as well as elsewhere in the world. The major experience of the racialization of Jews was in Nazi Germany, where the identification of Jews as an inferior “race” reached devastating proportions and resulted in horrendous persecution and genocide. Clearly, anti-Semitism needs to be understood as a form of oppression that is closely related to and often overlapping with racism, and must be opposed in every way possible. Because of the way the concept of race developed historically and is used in the United States, however, I will not in this book be describing Jews in racial terms nor dealing directly with the subject of anti-Semitism.

Writing an Ending to the Fable of the Happiness Machine

At various places throughout the book, I will return to the fable of the Happiness Machine and ask what kind of conclusion can be written to the story. I am also asking that you, the reader, help write the ending of the fable. A number of different endings are possible.

- *A win/lose ending:* In traditional fairy tales the perpetrators of evil are destroyed and everyone else lives happily ever after. Such a fairy-tale ending would therefore mean the destruction of the white society and the triumphant victory of people of color.

- *A los/lose ending:* There could be an ending in which everyone loses as the Happiness Machine self-destructs, taking the whole world with it. This ending presumes the greed of the Happy People leading them to cling to their machines, their worldviews, and their pretense about reality—until it is too late. Such a terrifying conclusion to the story precludes any hope of transformation and change.
- *A win/win ending:* Many people, perhaps the great majority of us—people of color and white people alike—have in mind another ending to the story, an ending that provides freedom and justice for all people. Is such an ending possible—a win/win ending in which everyone gains and no one loses?

It is the belief in the possibility of the third ending to the story that informs the fundamental assumptions of this book. Millions of people in the United States are involved in antiracism organizing in order to create a win/win ending to our story. Through their teaching, protesting, advocating, mobilizing, and organizing for personal, political, and social change, they express their conviction—as I wish to express my conviction in this book—that the Happiness Machine can either be dismantled or transformed and redirected to serve everyone on an equal and just basis. They believe—as I believe—that those who are now in power will yet be able to read the signs of the times, and yield their power rather than bring about their own destruction. This book is written especially for those who have dedicated themselves to working for racial justice, and who seek to be better equipped to be a part of writing a win/win ending to the story.