

# Section One

---

## Introduction And Purpose Of This Film

*Where do we begin teaching on the racism and prejudice ladder? What is the most important issue to address and advocate to our youth? How can we, as teachers, model awareness and acceptance? It begins with yourself and eventually disseminates to your students. It starts with awareness. It starts with knowledge. It starts by traveling through our history and exposing racism in the hidden corners of our lives by reevaluating who we are and where we fit into a diverse, American culture. When we look into the closets and corners of racism and bias, we find White Privilege.*

**Kristin A. Shultz, University of Iowa Student, spring 2004**

## Reflections From The Producer

At the core of racism is white privilege. Our ability to face racism and privilege and the institutional workings of these society-wide dynamics is a reflection of our willingness to deal with one of the greatest hindrances to teaching and learning. While the effects of racism on people of color are destructive and life threatening, the other side of that coin is that white people receive privileges in our society at the expense of people of color. If these privileges, such as being seen as trustworthy, capable of learning, belonging in America, etc. were afforded to all and the institutions that create working, living and learning structures in our society were racially unbiased, then fair treatment would be the “rights” of all as our Constitution lays out. However, what is written in our Constitution and even in laws passed forty years ago are often not enforced by our predominantly white-run institutions and government agencies.

This film is not about blame or pointing the finger at white people, not at all, as there is nothing effective or mobilizing about that approach. White people will be dealing with racism and privilege in ways that may be new and uncomfortable, but there is no escape to this aspect of the learning and unlearning around racism. It is in the interest of white people to deal with, heal from and help end racism. As a white antiracism activist and educator, much of my work has been in white-specific groups – doing our own work around racism without burdening people of color while being in the midst of our “steep learning curve.” What I’ve seen and read by other white antiracism activists (Joseph Barndt, Francis Kendall, Tim Wise) is that deep down in our human spirit there is a pathology of confusion and disconnection percolating. This is due to our position of privilege in society and lack of awareness or conviction to face it. After generations of pushing aside the whole truth around racism in the United States, our privilege has created a dissonance within ourselves, in our relationships across race, and in our sense of community. It is when we as white people don’t deal with it honestly and straightforwardly, that our thinking is illogical and our action ineffective in solving the multiple problems and injustices

resulting from racism.

Youth typically have fewer layers of denial, defense mechanisms and arrogance built up around racism than adults. Once a trustworthy and respectful learning space is set up and a foundation for a shared understanding around race, culture, and racism is developed, youth readily share stories and make connections to the white privilege they see in their world. By naming our experiences we can work to change our shared reality. So while this work isn't easy, it is quite possible and highly rewarding. We are capable as educators and adult allies to youth to create a constructive environment for respectful and shared learning around racism. *Shades of Youth* demonstrates this.

Every day, we challenge our students to learn. We ask young people in our care to take on new ideas and learn collaboratively with their peers, to step forth to apply new information. Ours is a society that values the demonstration of “knowing.” However, the learning process to arrive at that knowing is a vulnerable one that includes stretching ourselves and pushing the envelope of knowledge. This is where we share our humanity –learning in community. For youth of color spending their lives in schools where racism is rarely addressed, let alone addressed in a real and substantial way, their life experiences which can serve as an anchor for learning are rarely recognized or valued.

Looking at the discrepancies across race within our educational institutions, one hears about the achievement gap, advanced placement classes occupied by mostly white and Asian students, the digital divide, discipline rates much higher and more severe for children of color, divestment from the public schools, private schools and elite learning institutions being insular in their sociological make-up, schools populated by children of color being extremely under-resourced, and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids of immigrant children and families of color. It would seem impossible not to find an inroad from which to address racism regularly in the classroom and to support an on-going learning process for adults.

For me, as a white, middle class woman, coming to terms with racism has been one of my most pertinent arenas of learning and self-development. It is in the midst of this learning that I have come to understand the absolute differing perspectives and experiences across race. While there are a great deal of people, many well-meaning white folks, wishing racism would end or thinking that it is much better than it used to be (therefore it is mostly taken care of), we are mostly faking ourselves out and continuing with business as usual until something happens to challenge this view. Incidents such as a hate crime at school or a sensational story in the news call attention to what is going on all around us. By equipping ourselves as a nation with an analysis and understanding of racism both institutionally and individually, we can participate in more informed exchange and promote actions to once and for all overturn systemic racism.

This film is about youth sorting out racism, white privilege, and power on their own terms and in their own language. It is about adults sharing our power to include youth in the dialogue and, for the most part, after an initial prompt (such as an activity, discussion, or creative expression) the youth take the lead in teaching one another and teaching adults as well.

As adults, if we decide that our children do not need to understand and be able to critically think about racism and privilege, it is as though we think we can magically learn ways to resist the damage that racism does in all of our lives. A possibility as to why we don't educate our youth more effectively around racism is our fear that if we open up the dialogue around racism, we might not know how to work with or "manage" the confusion and the myriad of emotions that surface in our students. Being able to speak about deep-rooted issues such as racism is at the core of "classroom management." This film is an invitation to educators, parents, families, youth advocates, and all adults to use your power and influence to choose to be antiracism educators. As adults, we can increase our knowledge and willingness to talk about the reality of racism. We can move beyond the fear or discomfort toward building meaningful learning environments of adept problem-solvers and become members of compassionate multi-racial communities.

In respect and appreciation,  
Lauren Parker

*Stories can save lives. Stories can bind us, can break us open, can make us human to each other. There is also the politics of story telling. Who decides which stories are told and which ones are buried? Who is framing the picture, who is holding the camera? Stories can break down the walls of dividing us and them.*

**Valerie Kaur**

Creator and Producer of film, *Divided We Fall*, [www.dividedwefall.com](http://www.dividedwefall.com)

## **Background To Making The Film**

In 2005, after three years of co-leading the Youth Institute at The White Privilege Conference (WPC), Jesse Villalobos and Lauren Parker had the opportunity to have the institute documented by two youth, Julian Kucera (Lauren's fifteen year old son) and Catalina Vasquez, (a twenty-three year old Mills College student). *Shades of Youth* includes footage of the activities, dialogues, and lessons as well as individual interviews and the youth participants addressing the conference plenary. There is also footage taken outside of the conference. Here we see youth addressing these issues in their school, and we hear from spoken word artists who provide yet another pathway for us to deepen our understanding of youth perspectives of white privilege.

The *Shades of Youth* project is a film by youth for youth and adult allies where we